

CUSTER'S VICTORY TRUTH OF THE LITTLE BIGHORN

# HISTORY *of* WAR



**"IT WAS HELL  
ON EARTH"**

VETERAN GARTH WRIGHT  
ON HIS DRAMATIC ESCAPE

UNSUNG HEROES BEHIND THE "MIRACLE"

# DUNKIRK

HOW A VALIANT REARGUARD DEFENCE  
SAVED BRITAIN FROM ANNIHILATION

## PLUS:

- ★ The American Plains Wars
- ★ Inside the Falaise Pocket
- ★ Nova Scotia's first VC



**T-34**

INSIDE THE ARMoured  
HEART OF THE  
RED ARMY



**SKANDERBEG**

MEET ALBANIA'S  
MEDIEVAL WARLORD

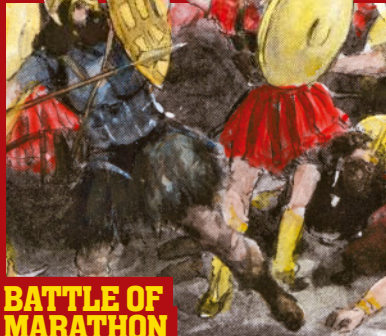
Future

ISSUE 044  
**Digital Edition**  
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**MERCENARIES  
AT WAR**

THE FOREIGN SOLDIERS ON  
ANGOLA'S FRONTLINE



**BATTLE OF  
MARATHON**

THE AGAINST-THE-ODDS VICTORY  
THAT SHOOK THE ANCIENT WORLD



**BRIEFING:  
BASQUE ETA**

DISCOVER THE RISE AND FALL  
OF SPAIN'S REBEL INSURGENCY



# KING & COUNTRY'S

# DUNKIRK



FoB119



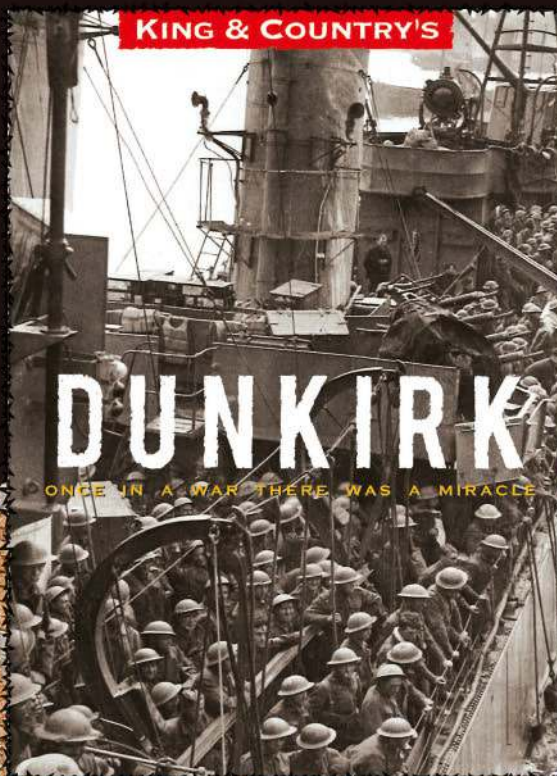
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**IN WAR MIRACLES** rarely happen... but in the early summer of 1940 what seemed like a miracle took place in the port and nearby beaches of a town in Northern France called... **DUNKIRK.**

At the time, the **B.E.F.** (*British Expeditionary Force*) had been cut off from the main French Army and forced to retreat to the channel coast by the speed and ferocity of the German 'blitzkrieg.' As Belgium collapsed the British government decided to launch '**Operation Dynamo**', the evacuation of the B.E.F. from Dunkirk.

Naval and civilian vessels of all shapes, sizes and descriptions were brought together to rescue the troops; *British, French* and some *Belgians* from Dunkirk and its beaches.

Numerous books, documentaries and a new motion picture have told the story of this almost miraculous evacuation and the amazing rescue of over 340,000 soldiers... but never in miniature!



## DUNKIRK

ONCE IN A WAR THERE WAS A MIRACLE

### DESTINATION: BLIGHTY!

At KING & COUNTRY we are proud to be the *only* military miniature company in the world to devote an entire series on the soldiers, fighting vehicles and even aircraft of the historic events during late May and early June 1940.

Here, you can see a small fraction of the all-metal and mixed media, hand-painted military miniatures and battlefield accessories that K&C produces about Dunkirk.

All of our ranges are in 1:30 scale and can be purchased from *K&C Authorized Dealers* around the world... or KING & COUNTRY direct!

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FoB151



Just some of K&C's British Expeditionary Force 'Tommy's' on their way back to Dunkirk.

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# Welcome

**"I was digging out a gun pit at Merville and every shovel full of earth that came up had a memento of a terrible battle from WWI... What a terrible war that must have been"**

– Garth Wright, Dunkirk veteran

**I**n 1940, while marching to war in Europe, soldiers like Garth Wright discovered sobering and morbid reminders of those who had come before, in the Great War.

What happened next was an immense turning point in world history, and this year's blockbuster *Dunkirk* offers a way for people to reconnect with that past and understand its importance for us today.

Earlier this year, History of War was invited to Normandy to commemorate the 73rd anniversary of D-Day. Along with acts of remembrance, joining the few remaining veterans able to

make the journey, the very region itself is a reminder of history's lessons, our place within it and our connection to those who came before.



*Tim*

**Tim Williamson**  
Editor



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## CONTRIBUTORS



### TOM GARNER

This issue Tom met with veteran Garth Wright, who shared his incredible story of survival on the beaches of Dunkirk (p. 28). Elsewhere he explores the horrific campaigns waged against Native Americans in the Plains Wars (p. 14).



### MURRAY DAHM

Marathon is widely regarded as one of the most important battles in world history, but many details of the battle itself baffle many historians to this day. Murray unpacks this momentous clash of arms and its importance in history, over on page 60.



### AL VENTER

Journalist, filmmaker and author of several military history titles, Al takes you inside the dangerous and often secretive world of the mercenary. In Part I of his new series: how mercenaries turned the tide of the Angolan Civil War (p.40)

[www.historyanswers.co.uk](http://www.historyanswers.co.uk)



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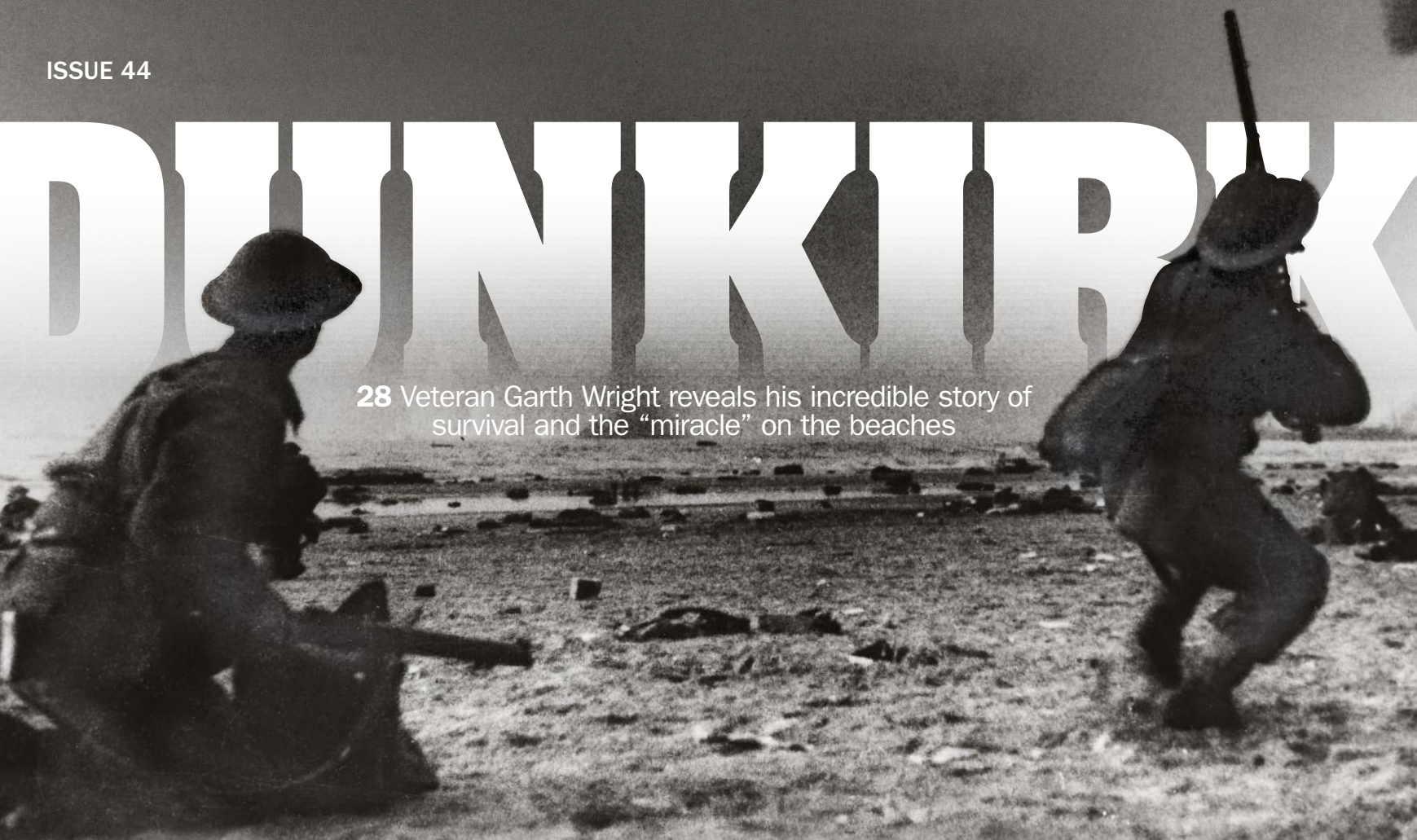
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RAF personnel on the deck of a ship during the evacuation from France, c. 18 June 1940





**28** Veteran Garth Wright reveals his incredible story of survival and the “miracle” on the beaches

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Just 100 years after its inception, the USA was embroiled in a violent colonial expansionist war

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Moving west into Native American territory, the USA found fierce opposition within several states

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The 7th Cavalry surprise the forces of Chief Black Kettle, in this bloody encounter

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An alternative analysis of the infamous Little Bighorn – was the last stand an American victory?

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Several different Native American tribes clashed with US army units on the battlefield

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Figures on both sides rose to fame and infamy during the long campaigns

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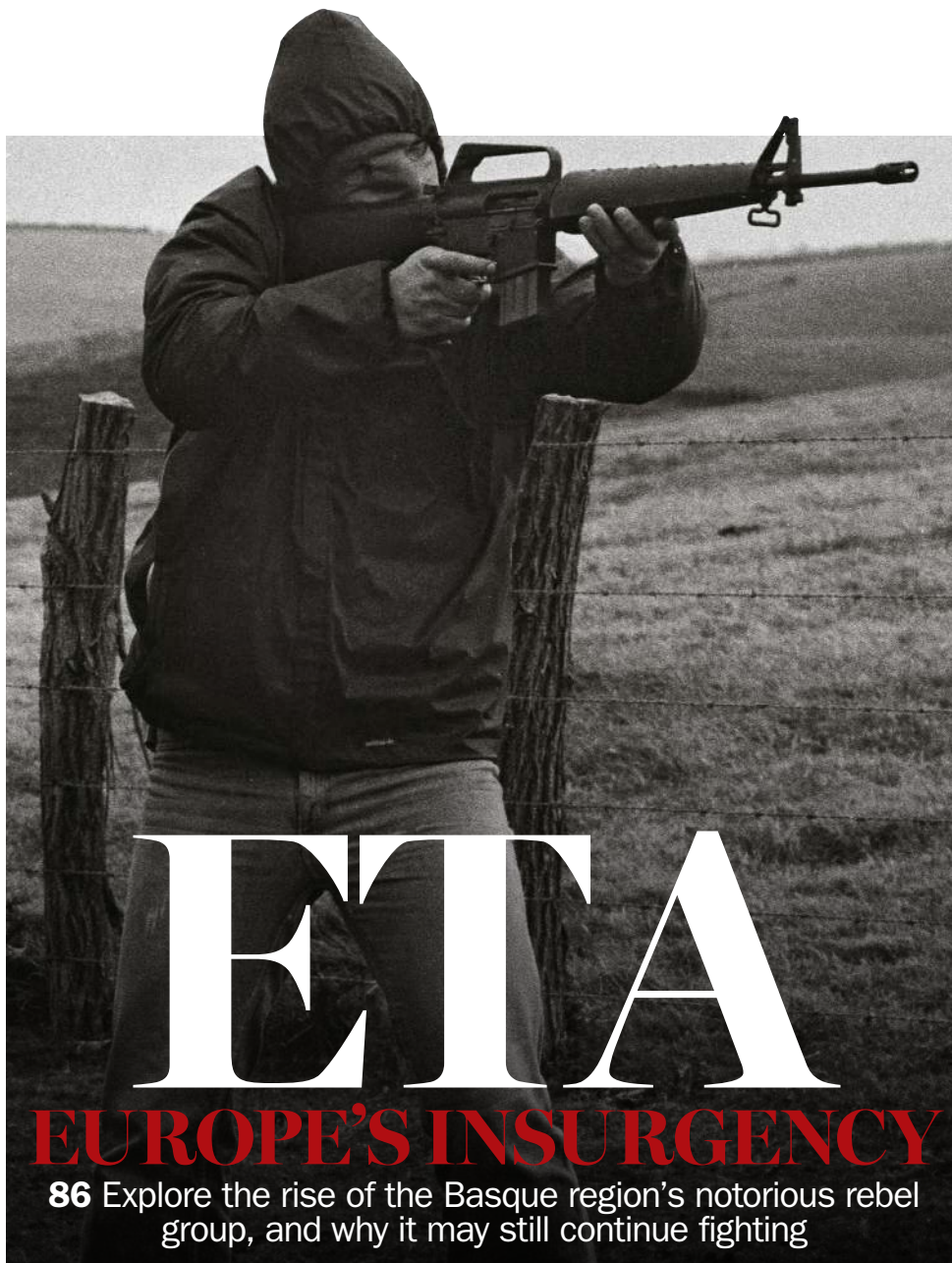
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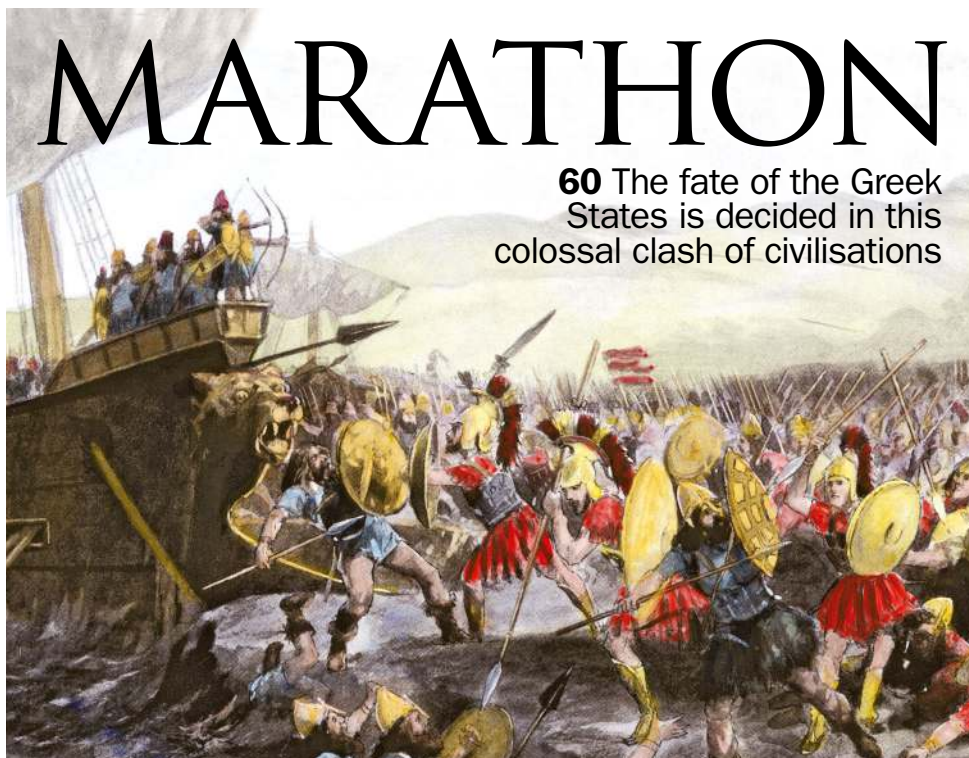




# ETA

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An incredible piece from the Crimean War

## SKANDERBEG

**50** How Albania's warrior hero defied the Ottoman Empire





# WAR<sup>in</sup> FOCUS

## LETHAL LYNX

Taken: **March 2003**


A British Lynx helicopter from the Joint Helicopter Force (JHF) picks up troops from 51 Squadron Royal Air Force (RAF) Regiment as a Chinook comes in for a landing on March 11, 2003, in the Kuwaiti desert near the Iraqi border. The Squadron contributed to Operation Telic in Iraq before redeploying to Afghanistan as part of Operation Herrick.











## **WAR** **in** **FOCUS** **BACK TO CAEN**

*Taken: June 2017*

British paratrooper veterans return to Caen, Normandy, 73 years after they faced heavy fighting in the region in the days following D-Day. They are (back L-R): Gordon Newton 9th Para, Cecil Jeffcoate 2nd Ox & Bucks, Jim Beasant 13th Para, George Talbot 2nd Ox & Bucks, Geoff Paterson 9th Para, (front L-R) Bill Bray, Nick Archdale and Ernie Stringer all 7th Para, Bill Gladden 6th Airborne Armoured Recon Reg. and Laurie Weedon of the Glider Pilot Reg.





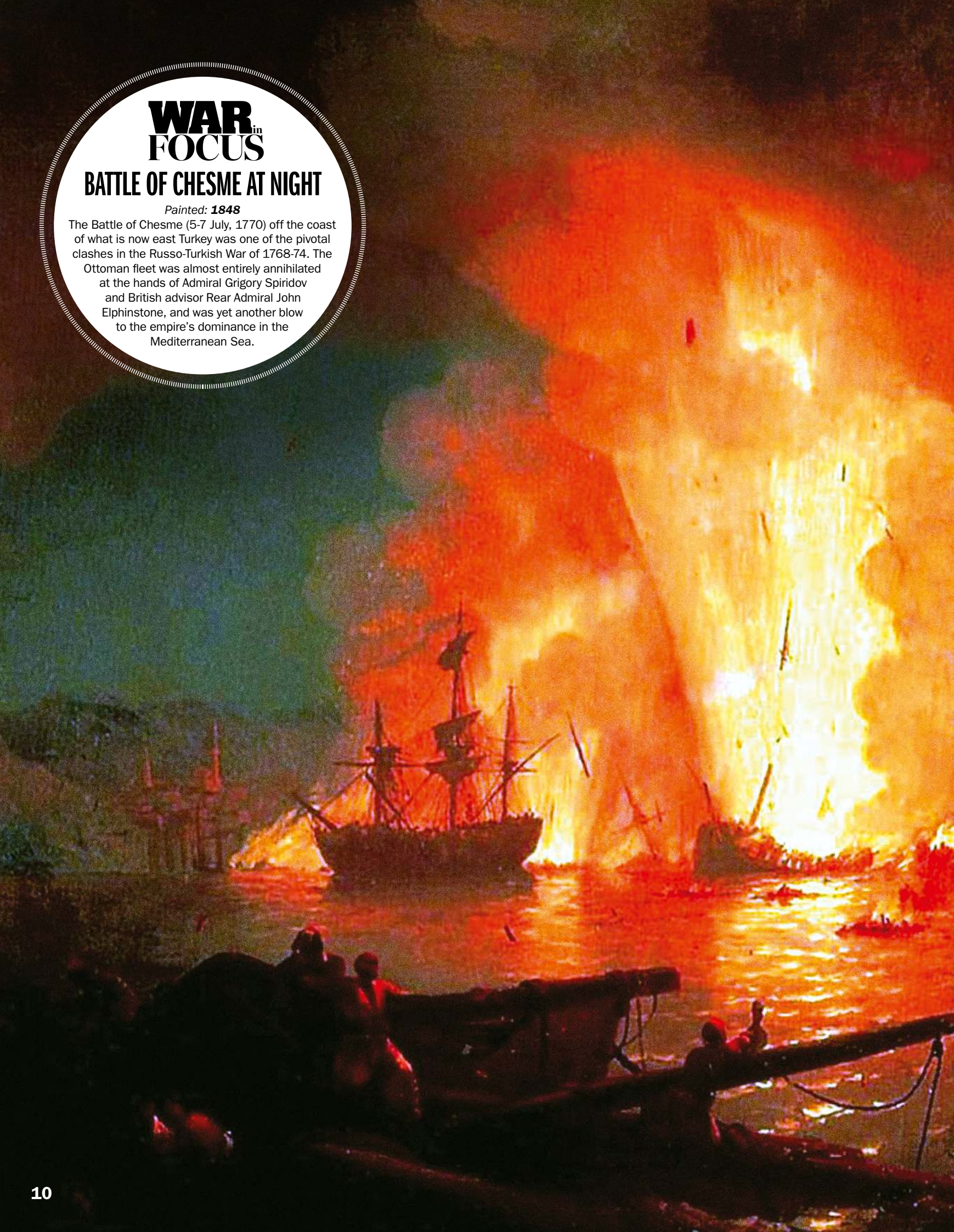


# WAR<sup>in</sup> FOCUS

## BATTLE OF CHESME AT NIGHT

*Painted: 1848*

The Battle of Chesme (5-7 July, 1770) off the coast of what is now east Turkey was one of the pivotal clashes in the Russo-Turkish War of 1768-74. The Ottoman fleet was almost entirely annihilated at the hands of Admiral Grigory Spiridov and British advisor Rear Admiral John Elphinstone, and was yet another blow to the empire's dominance in the Mediterranean Sea.











**WAR**  
**in**  
**FOCUS**  
**PUPPY PATROL**

*Taken: 16 June, 1943*

Private John C. Delaney, Private William F. Milkey and Private George W. Nusello pose with puppies they will train to become guard dogs at their Pacific naval base. Marine dogs were used throughout the war in the Pacific for guarding bases and foxholes, as well as detecting Japanese booby traps and mines. Dogs were even used to carry messages and supplies.









The 'Fetterman Fight' was the worst US military disaster during the Plains Wars until the Battle of the Little Bighorn



## TIMELINE OF... THE PLAINS WARS

During the 19th Century, the United States pursued grim, expansionist wars against Native American tribes on the Great Plains between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains

1854-56

### FIRST SIOUX WAR

Fighting broke out after Lakota Sioux committed the 'Grattan Massacre' of 30 US army soldiers commanded by Lieutenant John Grattan. The war ended after a punitive expedition at the Battle of Ash Hollow.

*The Battle of Ash Hollow was a US Army victory, that grimly set the tone of the Plains Wars with murderous white atrocities against Native Americans, including women and children*



1862

### DAKOTA WAR

At the height of the American Civil War, Dakota Sioux killed hundreds of white settlers in Minnesota. The backlash resulted in a US victory at the Battle of Wood Lake and mass Native American surrenders and hangings.

*Settlers escaping Dakota violence in 1862. 38 Dakota were subsequently hanged in the largest legal execution in US history*



1863-65

### COLORADO WAR

After US forces slaughtered 150-200 Native Americans in the 'Sand Creek Massacre', war broke out in Colorado. Attacks on white settlers increased before peace agreements were signed after a costly campaign.

*A Cheyenne eyewitness depiction of the Sand Creek Massacre. The US Volunteer Cavalry not only murdered large numbers of Native Americans, but also shockingly proceeded to mutilate many of the corpses*





**"80 US SOLDIERS WERE KILLED IN THE 'FETTERMAN FIGHT' AMBUSH"**



## RED CLOUD'S WAR

The Oglala Lakota chief Red Cloud led raids against white settlers along the Bozeman Trail. 80 US soldiers were killed in the 'Fetterman Fight' ambush, and the Treaty of Fort Laramie ensured a rare Native American victory.

General Crook's field headquarters during the 'Horsemeat March', 1876. Crook's men were forced to eat their injured horses while pursuing Sioux warriors after the Battle of the Little Bighorn



## GREAT SIOUX WAR

After the discovery of gold in the Black Hills, the Lakota and Cheyenne united to resist US attempts to secure South Dakota. Despite a Native American victory at the Little Bighorn, the US Army eventually won through pitched battles and relentless campaigning.

## BATTLE OF THE LITTLE BIGHORN

In the most famous clash of the Plains Wars, Lieutenant Colonel George A Custer was killed, along with around 260 soldiers of the US 7th Cavalry, at the Battle of the Little Bighorn. Native American casualties numbered at around 30.



'Custer's Last Stand' became an iconic symbolism of American heroism until the Sixties, when historians extensively researched and revised Custer's controversial reputation

1866-68

1876-77

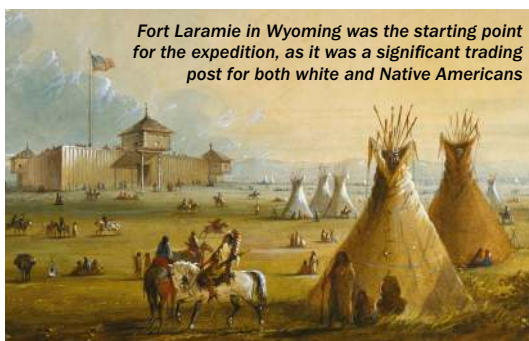
25-26 June 1876

29 December 1890

July-October 1865

## POWDER RIVER EXPEDITION

Brigadier General Patrick E Connor led US Volunteers against the Sioux, Cheyenne and Arapaho along the Bozeman Trail. Fort Connor was established, but the Native Americans remained undefeated.



Fort Laramie in Wyoming was the starting point for the expedition, as it was a significant trading post for both white and Native Americans



US soldiers burying dead Lakota Sioux in a mass grave. The Wounded Knee Massacre was a tragic coda to the Plains Wars

## WOUNDED KNEE MASSACRE

After the death of Sioux chief Sitting Bull, Big Foot and 350 followers were intercepted by the US 7th Cavalry, who attempted to disarm them. In the ensuing fire fight, between 150-300 Native Americans (including women and children) were killed.

Images: Alamy



# CHARTING THE PLAINS WARS

With fighting spread over eight states and spanning decades, the conflict between Native American tribes and the US Army was a relentlessly grim litany of battles, skirmishes and massacres



**MARIAS MASSACRE**  
23 JANUARY 1870  
MARIAS RIVER, MONTANA

Left: Lieutenant Grattan's arrogant and threatening behaviour towards the Sioux over cattle theft results in his humiliating defeat and death. His body is found with 24 arrow wounds

**BATTLE OF KILLDEER MOUNTAIN**  
28-29 JULY 1864  
DUNN COUNTY, NORTH DAKOTA

**BATTLE OF WOLF MOUNTAIN**  
6-13 JANUARY 1842  
TONGUE RIVER VALLEY, MONTANA

**BATTLE OF LITTLE MUDDY CREEK**  
7 MAY 1877  
ROSEBUD COUNTY, MONTANA

**BATTLE OF THE ROSEBUD**  
17 JUNE 1876  
BIG HORN COUNTY, MONTANA

6

**WOUNDED KNEE MASSACRE**  
29 DECEMBER 1890  
WOUNDED KNEE CREEK, SOUTH DAKOTA

**POWDER RIVER MASSACRE**  
16 AUGUST 1865  
POWDER RIVER, JOHNSON COUNTY, WYOMING

**BATTLE OF PLATTE BRIDGE**  
26 JULY 1865  
CASPER, WYOMING

4

8

**BATTLE OF ASH HOLLOW**  
3 SEPTEMBER 1855  
ASH HOLLOW, NEBRASKA

**BATTLE OF JULESBURG**  
7 JANUARY 1865  
JULESBURG, COLORADO

3

## 1 GRATTAN MASSACRE

19 AUGUST 1854 **EAST OF FORT LARAMIE, NEBRASKA**

Second Lieutenant John Grattan effectively starts the Plains Wars when he and his platoon are killed by Lakota Sioux. The cause of the massacre is a dispute arising from the minor theft of a cow by a Native American.

## 2 BATTLE OF WHITESTONE HILL

3-5 SEPTEMBER 1863 **DAKOTA TERRITORY, DICKEY COUNTY, NORTH DAKOTA**

Brigadier General Alfred Sully attacks a Sioux camp as part of a punitive mission to punish participants of the Dakota War. In the ensuing 'battle' hundreds of Native Americans are killed or captured, compared to light US Army casualties.

## 3 SAND CREEK MASSACRE

29 NOVEMBER 1864 **COLORADO TERRITORY, KIOWA COUNTY, COLORADO**

700 Colorado militiamen attack Cheyenne and Arapaho villages. After the soldiers engage in heavy drinking, Colonel John Chivington orders the massacre of the Native Americans, resulting in 70-163 killed, two-thirds of them women and children.



Left: Lieutenant General William Sherman and US officials with Sioux chiefs at Fort Laramie, 1868. The resulting broken treaty escalates the bloodshed of the Plains Wars

## 4 TREATY OF FORT LARAMIE

29 APRIL 1868 **FORT LARAMIE, GOSHEN COUNTY, WYOMING**

The US government recognises the Black Hills as part of the Great Sioux Reservation and to be exclusively used by the Sioux. Originally intended as a peace treaty, the US breaks its promise when gold is discovered in the hills during the 1870s. The result is the Great Sioux War.





Above: The US 7th Cavalry charging Black Kettle's village

## 5 BATTLE OF WASHITA RIVER

27 NOVEMBER 1868 **ROGER MILLS COUNTY, OKLAHOMA**

During a winter campaign, Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer leads the US 7th Cavalry to a large Cheyenne camp on the Washita River. The troops charge from all directions, leaving at least 100 Cheyenne dead including Chief Black Kettle.

## 6 BATTLE OF THE LITTLE BIGHORN

25-26 JUNE 1876 **NEAR LITTLE BIGHORN RIVER, BIG HORN COUNTY, MONTANA**

Northern tribes of Native Americans under Sitting Bull wage war to defend their lands in the Black Hills. In a famous clash near the Little Bighorn River George A. Custer is defeated and killed along with hundreds of his men.

Right: A Cheyenne artist's depiction of the Battle of the Little Bighorn. Created around 1878, the picture is painted on bison hide

### BATTLE OF STONY LAKE

28 JULY 1863  
BURLEIGH COUNTY, NORTH DAKOTA

### BATTLE OF WOOD LAKE

23 SEPTEMBER 1862  
YELLOW MEDICINE COUNTY, MINNESOTA

### BATTLE OF BIRCH COULEE

2 SEPTEMBER 1862  
MORTON, RENVILLE COUNTY, MINNESOTA

### BATTLE OF REDWOOD FERRY

18 AUGUST 1862  
BIRCH COULEE TOWNSHIP, RENVILLE COUNTY, MINNESOTA

### BATTLES OF NEW ULM

19 AND 23 AUGUST 1862  
NEW ULM, BROWN COUNTY, MINNESOTA

### BATTLE OF FORT RIDGELEY

20-22 AUGUST 1862  
NICOLLET COUNTY, MINNESOTA

### ATTACK AT THE LOWER SIOUX AGENCY

18 AUGUST 1862  
LOWER SIOUX AGENCY, REDWOOD COUNTY, MINNESOTA

## 7 BATTLE OF SLIM BUTTES

9-10 SEPTEMBER 1876 **GREAT SIOUX RESERVATION, HARDING COUNTY, SOUTH DAKOTA**

After the humiliating defeat of the Little Bighorn, Brigadier General George Crook attacks a Sioux camp at Slim Buttes. The village is burned, Chief American Horse is killed and a rescue attempt by Crazy Horse fails. Women and children are again among the dead.

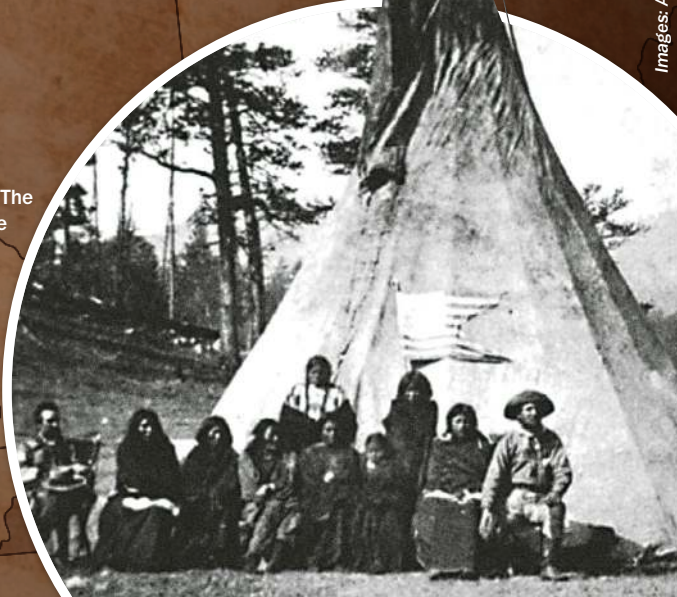
## 8 FORT ROBINSON MASSACRE

9-22 JANUARY 1879 **FORT ROBINSON, NEBRASKA**

149 Cheyenne led by Dull Knife are intercepted by the US Army and escorted to Fort Robinson as prisoners. The Cheyenne break out and shoot soldiers while they flee. A running fight ensues where 64 Cheyenne are killed and others recaptured.



A 7th Cavalry flag found at Slim Buttes. It is fastened to the tip of Chief American Horse only months after the Battle of the Little Bighorn



Images: Alamy, FreeVectorMaps

"THE VILLAGE IS BURNED, CHIEF AMERICAN HORSE IS KILLED AND A RESCUE ATTEMPT BY CRAZY HORSE FAILS"



# BATTLE OF WASHITA RIVER

Eight years before the Battle of the Little Bighorn, George Armstrong Custer led his 7th Cavalry against the Cheyenne chief Black Kettle

**T**he Plains Wars were punctuated more by skirmishes and small-scale actions than by traditional pitched battles. The Native American way of warfare did not lend itself to large-scale confrontations, and when sizeable opposing forces did meet, the results were usually predictable.

The Battle of Washita River came at the end of a period of increasing tension and hostility between the Southern Cheyenne and white settlers in the Colorado Territory. Despite the regular signing of peace treaties, relations were fractious in the 1860s. Even the presence of a chief, Black Kettle, who recognised the futility of fighting the US Government, was not enough

to stop the endless raiding of Cheyenne war parties. It could only lead to one conclusion.

Tales of Cheyenne brutality were used to whip up war fervour in the east. Relations soured still further when Cheyenne in the Sand Creek Reservation were attacked by Colorado state forces in 1864. Black Kettle, among the survivors of the massacre, continued to push for peace and signed further treaties, but his influence was waning and the hot-headed young warriors of his tribe proved difficult to control.

## The winter campaign

By the winter of 1868, a further offensive by US Government forces was mounted. At the time, Black Kettle's camp formed the end of a

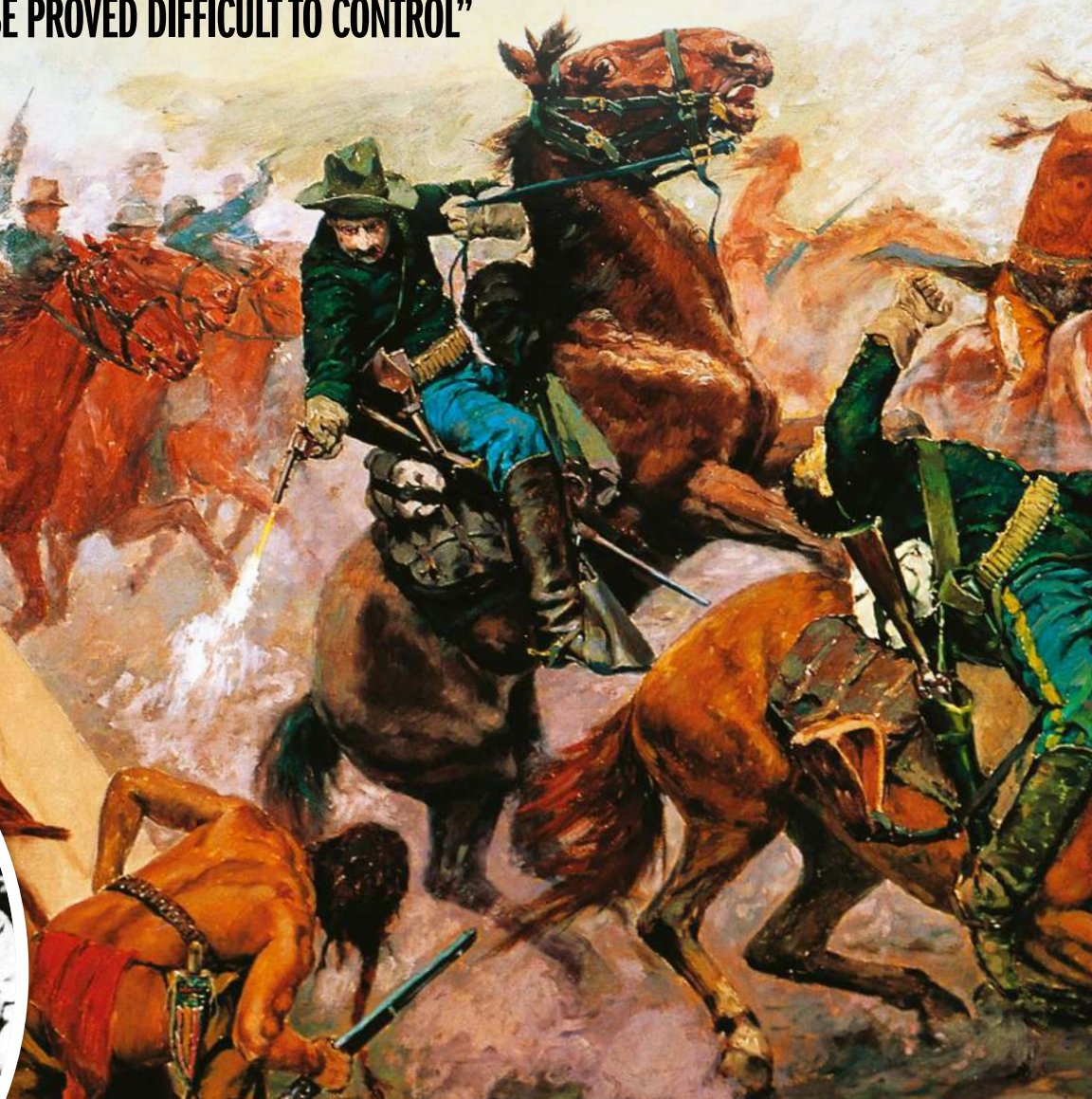
ten-mile string of mostly Southern Cheyenne camps along the Washita River. The timing of the campaign was deliberate. General Philip Sheridan, commanding the Department of the Missouri, intended to bring the Native American tribes to heel, forcing them to surrender by destroying the supplies they would need to survive the winter.

Raiding by Cheyenne warriors was still ongoing, but now they were being tracked by a force of 7th Cavalry troopers under Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer. More specifically, it was the Osage scouts in Custer's command who were doing the tracking, and on the night of 26 November a Cheyenne war party led Custer's men straight to Black Kettle's camp.

**"HIS INFLUENCE WAS WANING AND THE HOT-HEADED YOUNG WARRIORS OF HIS TRIBE PROVED DIFFICULT TO CONTROL"**

*The fighting at Washita River was short, sharp and one-sided*

**Below:** The Cheyenne chief Black Kettle repeatedly tried to make peace with the US Government. (Black Kettle is sitting in the centre row, peering over the hat of the man kneeling in front of him)





Black Kettle had planned to move his people the next day, to be closer to others in the long string of encampments. There were rumours from returning warriors that cavalry were in the area, but it was not believed that they would mount operations in such bad weather. Even so, Black Kettle decided to send men out to meet any soldiers to reassure them of his peaceful intentions, but only when the skies had cleared and it had stopped snowing.

Black Kettle's wife, Medicine Woman, is believed to have remonstrated with him to move camp immediately, but it was already too late. As she argued for an earlier departure, Custer's men were taking up positions around the village. Custer had divided his force of 574 men into four groups in order to attack from multiple angles at daybreak.

### The dawn strike

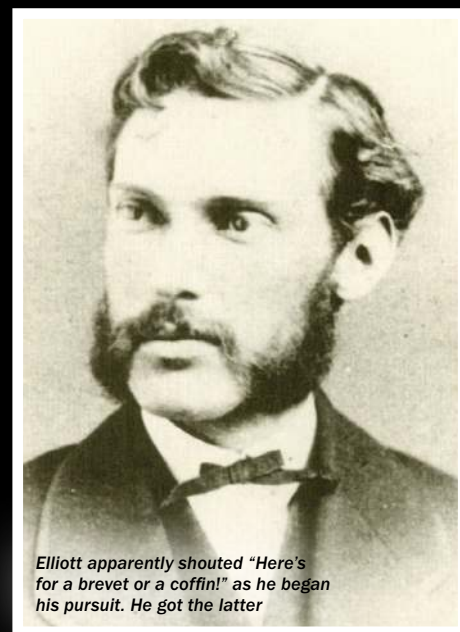
The battle itself followed the same pattern as so many others in the Plains Wars. Custer's men hit the camp at daybreak (the regiment's band played their song, *Gary Owen*, during the charge) and soon scattered the Cheyennes. Only one of Custer's men was killed during the assault, Captain Louis McLane Hamilton, with several more suffering wounds.

Casualties might have remained at this extremely low level were it not for the rash actions of Major Joel Elliott. Taking 19 men with him, he made a calculated grab for glory by pursuing fleeing warriors. The tables were turned when the small force ran into a band of Arapaho and was completely wiped out.

Estimates of Cheyenne deaths have ranged from a dozen or so warriors up to 140 (a ridiculously high number), with as many as 75 women and children killed as well. Black Kettle and his wife were shot dead while trying to escape and debate has raged over whether or not Custer's troopers were engaged in a battle or a massacre.

On the one hand, more than 50 prisoners were taken, although this was with the deliberate intent of using them as a human shield to deter retaliatory attacks as the cavalry withdrew. On the other hand, there are reliable eye-witness accounts of soldiers killing women and children, which even Custer admitted, although he declared it was inevitable in the chaos of the attack and that some women had borne arms.

There is no doubt that, battle or massacre, the action on the Washita River was crushingly one-sided.



*Elliott apparently shouted "Here's for a brevet or a coffin!" as he began his pursuit. He got the latter*

## THE SEEDS OF DISCORD

### THE DEATH OF MAJOR JOEL ELLIOTT WAS A SOURCE OF BITTERNESS THAT WOULD HAVE REPERCUSSIONS FOR CUSTER

Major Joel Elliott's reckless action in pursuing fleeing Cheyenne warriors during the Battle of Washita River not only inflated the casualty list for the action, it also sowed the seeds of discord within the ranks of the 7th Cavalry - discord that was still apparent eight years later.

Custer's tactics had been to hit Black Kettle's camp hard and then withdraw quickly before reinforcements from the other encampments along the Washita could arrive. His concern at this possibility was borne out by the fact that it was just such reinforcements that destroyed Elliott's small band.

Elliott was acting without authorisation (and without caution), but the fact that Custer left the scene so quickly after the attack, without waiting to find out what had become of Elliott and his troopers, was viewed with distaste. Most notably, Captain Frederick Benteen, leading H Company at the Washita and a personal friend of Elliott, never forgave his flamboyant commanding officer.

This personal grudge would become particularly intriguing when Benteen failed to come to Custer's aid at the Little Bighorn, choosing instead to reinforce Major Reno's beleaguered detachment. He received heavy criticism for 'abandoning' Custer to his fate.

**"CAPTAIN FREDERICK BENTEEN, LEADING H COMPANY AT THE WASHITA AND A PERSONAL FRIEND OF ELLIOTT, NEVER FORGAVE HIS FLAMBOYANT COMMANDING OFFICER"**



*Image: Getty*



# WEAPONS & EQUIPMENT

Representing a clash between the old world and the new, weaponry used during the Plains Wars was extremely diverse

**A**lthough at first glance the fighting between the United States Army and the Native American tribes was hopelessly one-sided, decades of trading and plunder meant that Lakota,

Cheyenne and Kiowa warriors were well-armed, and sometimes carried more sophisticated weaponry than their opponents. At the same time, traditional Native American weapons still had their role to play.

## ★ TRAPDOOR BREECH

The breech-loading design saw one cartridge at a time fed into the carbine. It was mostly a reliable, if rather slow, mechanism, although copper-cased cartridges were prone to jamming.

## MODEL 1873 SPRINGFIELD CARBINE

This shortened version of the Model 1873 Springfield Rifle was standard issue among cavalry regiments for the latter portion of the 19th century. It emerged from a trial of 99 different models as the US Army searched for a new weapon in the post-Civil War era.

*Below: The 1873 Springfield was one of the most prolific firearms used in the Plains Wars*

## ★ RATE OF FIRE

In trials, the Model 1873 managed between 15 and 19 shots per minute – a great improvement over the muzzle-loaders of the Civil War era, although rates would fall in the stress of combat.

## ★ PACKING A PUNCH

The .45 calibre rounds delivered a serious blow, but to reduce recoil, carbine cartridges used a smaller charge of black powder (3.6g as opposed to 4.5g), which also reduced muzzle velocity and range.

## NORTH AMERICAN HUNTING BOW

Although firearms were favoured for warfare, the hunting bow remained a viable and revered weapon among Native American tribes (and they were more proficient in their use than they were with rifles). The bow was reinforced with sinew on one side, giving it extra power and range.

*This bow, from the Crow tribe, is made of Osage Orangewood and was designed for hunting buffalo*

## MEDICINE SHIELD

Physical danger was a given on the field of combat, but Native American warriors believed that a medicine shield could protect their spirit as well. Shield designs were a personal matter, but often incorporated animals, with the intention of imparting some of the animal's characteristics onto the warrior.

**“NATIVE AMERICAN WARRIORS BELIEVED THAT A MEDICINE SHIELD COULD PROTECT THEIR SPIRIT”**

*Right: A medicine shield might include quite literal imagery. On this example, bullets are depicted as bouncing harmlessly away*





# TOMAHAWK

The quintessential Native American weapon, the tomahawk also had applications away from the battlefield, making it a versatile implement. It was so effective, British light infantry units in the French and Indian War were often equipped with tomahawks, and the design is still active today.

Originally made from stone, tomahawk heads were upgraded to metal after the arrival of Europeans on the continent

“BRITISH LIGHT INFANTRY UNITS IN THE FRENCH AND INDIAN WAR WERE OFTEN EQUIPPED WITH TOMAHAWKS, AND THE DESIGN IS STILL ACTIVE TODAY”

## ★ SHORTENED BARREL

The cavalry carbine had a 22in. barrel as opposed to the 32.625in. barrel of the rifle. This made the weapon easier to handle on horseback, but also made it less accurate.

The Model 1866 was nicknamed the 'yellow boy' due to the colour of its bronze-alloy frame. Later models used a steel frame

# MODEL 1866 WINCHESTER

The first lever-action repeating rifle made by Winchester, the 66 was hard-wearing and reliable. Not as famous as its 1873 sibling, it was often found in the hands of Native American warriors, allowing them to outgun their US Army opponents, although shortages of ammunition hindered their effectiveness.

# COLT SINGLE ACTION ARMY REVOLVER

One of the most famous sidearms of all time, the 'Peacemaker' was the secondary weapon of the cavalry trooper. Firing a .45 calibre round, the cavalry model was distinguished by a longer barrel (7.5in), and featured a six-chambered cylinder.

The US Government ordered 8,000 of the new Colt SAA revolvers on 23 January 1873

“ONE OF THE MOST FAMOUS SIDEARMS OF ALL TIME, THE 'PEACEMAKER' WAS THE SECONDARY WEAPON OF THE CAVALRY TROOPER”

Images: Alamy, Mary Evans, Getty



# HOW CUSTER WON

The Battle of the Little Bighorn is remembered as an heroic last stand, but was it also an American victory?

In 1876, the United States marked its 100th birthday – the blood had washed out of the Potomac, and the nation was celebrating. A bright future seemed just ahead for the young country. However, further west a much older nation felt very differently. The Sioux had owned the northern plains until the coming of the white man. They lived a nomadic life in pursuit of the buffalo that provided essentials of food, clothing and shelter. They claimed their territory by right of force.

Western expansion brought settlers into conflict with this way of life. In 1868, the United States signed a treaty setting aside the Black Hills “for the absolute and undisturbed use and occupancy of the Sioux forever.” In 1874, Custer led a large expedition into the area and discovered gold, starting an avalanche of prospectors into the Lakota sacred territory. By 1875 there were thousands of gold miners and various followers in the sacred Black Hills area. A government order of December 3, 1875 required all Sioux to be on the Dakota reservation by 31 January 1876 or be considered “hostiles”. This ordinance was ignored by large bands of Sioux, who expected to follow their annual custom of gathering in a large group in Southern Montana.

## Little Bighorn

This battle has been subject to detailed analysis since 1876 in numerous publications, so only a very brief outline is given here.

The Little Bighorn River itself is shallow. The Sioux were camped in the valley area south of the river, where the ground rises to about 200 feet above the river on the north side.

General Phil Sheridan sent three columns of troops into the Montana Territory to find the enemy and move them back to the reservation. Custer was sent ahead as a reconnaissance in force. He divided his regiment into three battalions: the pack train guarded by three companies (125 men) under Captain Benteen; three companies (140 men) under Major Reno, and five companies (210 men) commanded by Custer.

Custer's Crow scouts discovered the Sioux encampment of between 1,500 and

2,000 warriors. He ordered Reno to attack the southern end of the village. Reno was overwhelmed and driven back to the top of the ridge, now known as Reno-Benteen. The besieged troops constructed defensive works. Custer's troops went to the north-east side, some tried to attack at Medicine Tail Coulee, the warriors attacked the separated cavalry men. The other part of Custer's battalion gathered at Last Stand Hill and were killed. Custer's remaining troops, under Reno and Benteen, held the warriors off until the following day when the Sioux left the area.

## Custer's Forces Victorious

While an obviously catastrophic personal setback for the man himself, Custer's death is not the hallmark of victory or defeat. Nelson's triumph at Trafalgar (1805) is an example of death by a victorious commander.

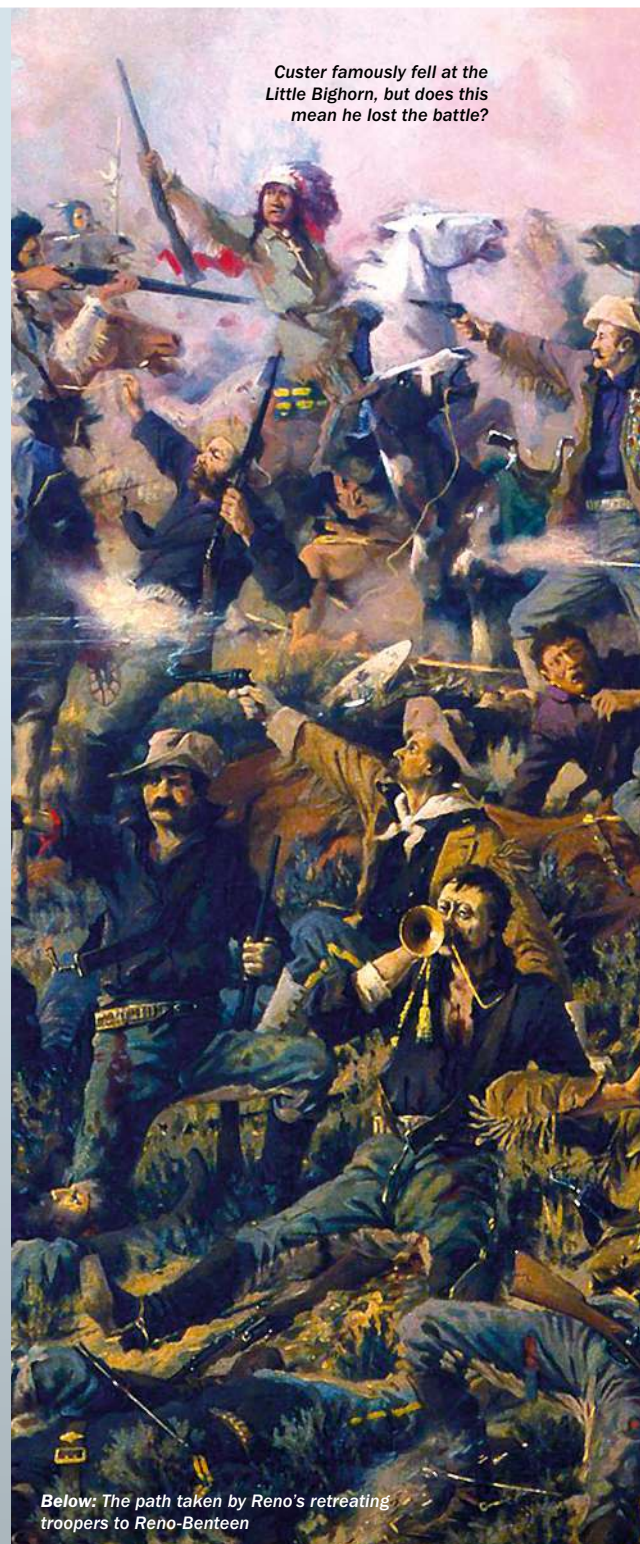
What constitutes a victory? Consider Meade at Gettysburg, (1863) after ‘Pickett's Charge’ failed, Lee returned to Virginia. Meade was exposed to considerable peril, but his survival was not essential for victory. The Confederate Army left the field, and the Union Army won.

The troopers with Custer were killed, but that was not Custer's entire unit. The rest of his troops under Reno and Benteen held on for another day against the Sioux warriors. Custer's remaining troops held, and the Sioux left, giving Custer's forces the victory. Custer had Crow scouts as part of his forces – a tribe that hated the Sioux, and were operating under Custer's command under the theory, ‘the enemy of my enemy is my friend’. The Battlefield Park today is part of the Crow reservation – Custer's forces still hold the ground.

Another definition of victory is “imposing your will on the enemy”. The Sioux wished to camp and hunt as they always had. The US Army wanted to drive them back to the reservation. The native forces left the battlefield area and eventually retreated to the reservation. Custer's forces had achieved their objective.

So as General Sheridan (John Lital) said to Libbie Custer (Olivia De Havilland) in the last line of the movie, *They Died With Their Boots On*, “Your soldier won his last fight, after all”.

Custer famously fell at the Little Bighorn, but does this mean he lost the battle?



Below: The path taken by Reno's retreating troopers to Reno-Benteen





**“WHILE AN OBVIOUSLY CATASTROPHIC PERSONAL SETBACK FOR THE MAN HIMSELF, CUSTER’S DEATH IS NOT THE HALLMARK OF VICTORY OR DEFEAT”**



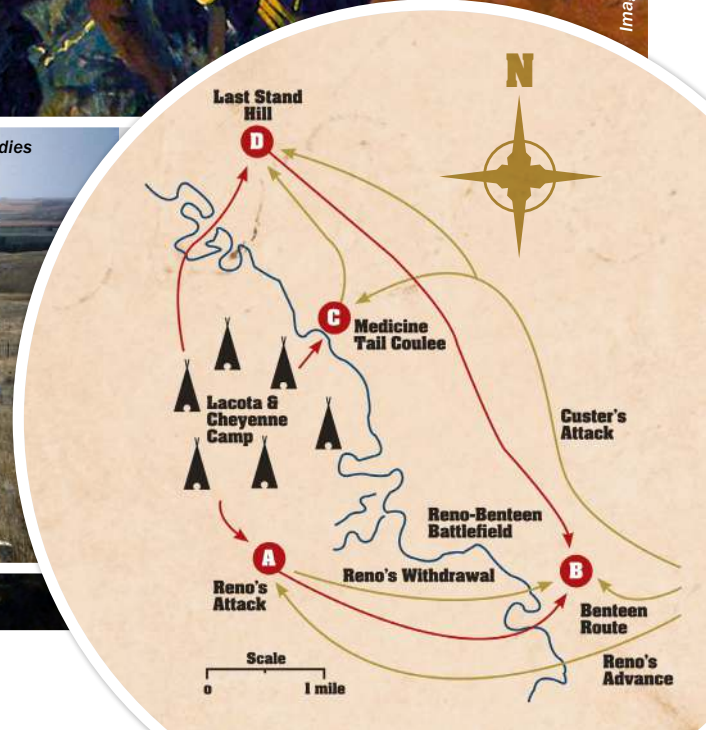
Image: Getty



Marker for the mass grave of dead cavalry enlisted soldiers



View from Last Stand Hill showing stones indicating location of bodies after battle. The Custer marker is emphasised with black





# IN THE RANKS

Shifting alliances and inter-tribal conflicts made for a confusing situation during the Plains Wars

**N**ative American tribes spent as much time fighting each other as they did the soldiers of the US Army, and although their hit-and-run tactics were effective and came to be feared by the US Cavalry regiments tasked with suppressing them, they were generally outmatched when it came to large-scale battles.

## 7TH CAVALRY REGIMENT

INFAMOUS FOR ITS DEFEAT AT THE LITTLE BIG HORN, THE 7TH IS ONE OF THE UNITED STATES' MOST DECORATED CAVALRY UNITS

The 7th Cavalry was not formed until after the Civil War, but it quickly started to carve out one of the most colourful histories in the US Army. Fort Riley, in Kansas, was the starting point, before a move to Fort Abraham Lincoln in the Dakota Territory in 1873.

A cavalry regiment of the day numbered around 1,000 troopers, divided into 12 companies (also known as 'troops') of between 79 and 95 men each. It was common for regiments to be widely dispersed, with forts often home to a single company.

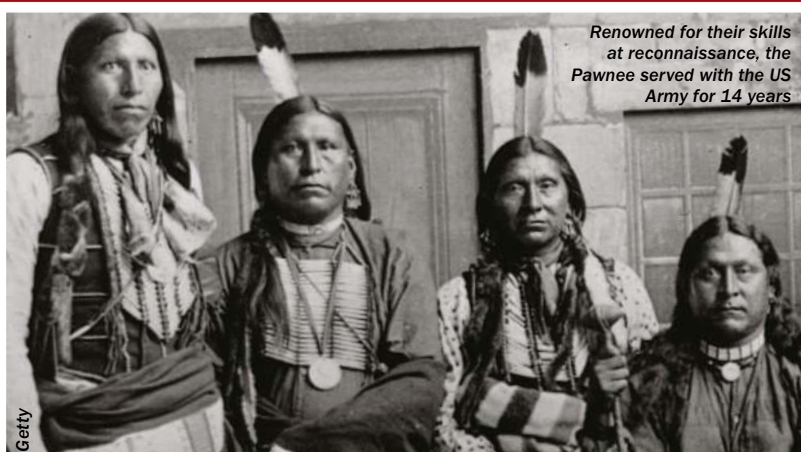
Basic training was just that, and few men were familiar with horses before joining up. There was also very limited opportunity for drill at anything more than company strength and promotion among the officer corps was notoriously sluggish.

Armament comprised a Model 1873 'Trapdoor' Springfield Carbine, the Colt Single Action Army revolver and a cumbersome sabre, which would usually be left at the fort during patrols or on campaign. Indians were the least of the troopers' concerns – they were far more likely to fall victim to illness due to poor standards of hygiene.

## PAWNEE SCOUT

ANTAGONISM WITH OTHER NATIVE AMERICAN TRIBES MADE THE PAWNEE WELL QUALIFIED TO WORK AS SCOUTS FOR THE US ARMY

War with the Cheyenne, Lakota and Comanche, together with the ravages of European diseases, had seen Pawnee numbers dwindle to fewer than 4,000 by the middle of the 19th century. Service as scouts with the cavalry allowed them to exact some revenge on their tormentors, and their knowledge of the customs and methods of their opponents, together with their excellent tracking skills, were a major boon to the US Army. Scouts would usually wear a combination of native dress and army uniforms.



Renowned for their skills at reconnaissance, the Pawnee served with the US Army for 14 years

Getty

From 1866-1881 the 7th Cavalry Regiment marched over 292,000km





**“THE LAKOTA WOULD OFTEN HAVE BETTER WEAPONRY THAN THEIR US ARMY OPPONENTS BUT WERE LESS FAMILIAR WITH THEIR FIREARMS”**

The name ‘Hunkpapa’ means ‘Head of the Circle’. Traditionally, the Hunkpapa set up their tents by the entrance to the circle of the Great Council

## HUNKPAPA WARRIOR

THE LAKOTA WERE A CONFEDERATION OF SEVEN SIOUX TRIBES, INCLUDING HUNKPAPA, OGLALA AND BLACK FEET

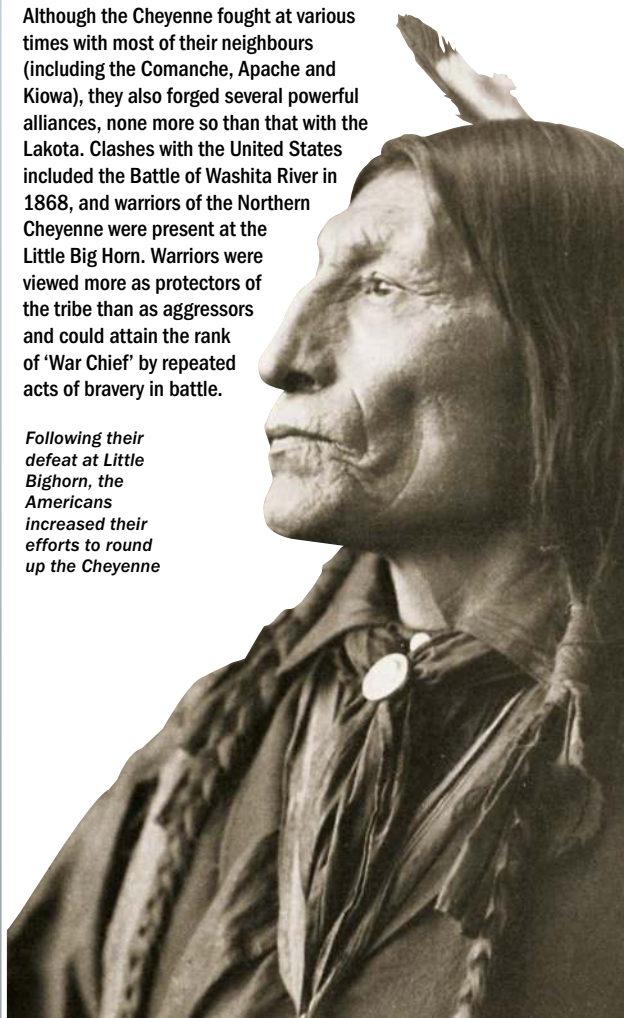
The Hunkpapa story was a familiar one of inter-tribal conflict and an ultimately futile resistance to the armed forces of the United States. Numbering around 30,000 in 1855, they took their place in the Great Sioux Reservation in 1868 but remained restless and repeatedly pushed into neighbouring territories, clashing with Custer’s 7th Cavalry in 1873 and later taking part in the victory at the Little Big Horn. The Lakota would often have better weaponry than their US Army opponents but were less familiar with their firearms, while scarcity of ammunition was a major issue.

## CHEYENNE WARRIOR

ONE OF THE MAJOR NATIVE AMERICAN TRIBES, THE CHEYENNE HAD A PROUD HISTORY IN BATTLE

Although the Cheyenne fought at various times with most of their neighbours (including the Comanche, Apache and Kiowa), they also forged several powerful alliances, none more so than that with the Lakota. Clashes with the United States included the Battle of Washita River in 1868, and warriors of the Northern Cheyenne were present at the Little Big Horn. Warriors were viewed more as protectors of the tribe than as aggressors and could attain the rank of ‘War Chief’ by repeated acts of bravery in battle.

*Following their defeat at Little Bighorn, the Americans increased their efforts to round up the Cheyenne*





# WARRIORS & COMMANDERS

## OF THE PLAINS WARS

Leaders were split between often prejudiced and arrogant US soldiers, and persecuted but defiant Native American warriors

### SITTING BULL 1831-90 HUNKPAPA LAKOTA THE SPIRITUAL VICTOR OF THE LITTLE BIGHORN

Sitting Bull was an icon of Native American resistance to US persecution and expansionism. Born into the Hunkpapa division of Lakota Sioux, he joined his first war party aged 14, and quickly became known for his fearlessness in battle. As the tribal leader of the Strong Heart warrior society, he also extended Sioux hunting grounds westward into former Shoshone territory, and first clashed with US forces in 1863. With his talented vice-chief Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull constantly harassed US Army incursions into Sioux hunting grounds, and became the principal chief of the entire Sioux nation in 1867.

When the Great Sioux War broke out in 1876, Sitting Bull refused US demands to move from the Black

*Left: Sitting Bull's defiance against the aggression of the United States became legendary and he once famously said, "If we must die, we die defending our rights"*

Hills to reservations, and summoned Sioux, Cheyenne and Arapaho to his camp in Montana. After Crazy Horse's victory at the Battle of the Rosebud, Sitting Bull performed a 'Sun Dance' and predicted soldiers falling into his camp. This prophecy was fulfilled soon afterwards on 25 June 1876, when George Custer attacked his village. Although he was too old to fight, Sitting Bull was the architect of the subsequent Sioux success at the Battle of the Little Bighorn. Five companies of the US 7th Cavalry were destroyed, and hundreds of white soldiers were killed, including Custer.

The news of Sitting Bull's victory shocked the USA, but although the Sioux could win battles, they could not do the same with the war. The decline of buffalo numbers forced Sitting Bull and his followers to flee to Canada. However, hunger among his people forced him to return to the USA, and he surrendered at Fort Buford in July 1881.

Sitting Bull was later killed in 1890 in attempt to arrest him in connection with the Ghost Dance religious movement. The Wounded Knee Massacre took place shortly afterwards.

### GEORGE ARMSTRONG CUSTER 1839-76 UNITED STATES OF AMERICA THE FAMOUS BUT CONTROVERSIAL CAVALRY COMMANDER

Custer is one of the most recognisable figures in American history. Born in Ohio, he attended West Point, but was an undistinguished cadet who graduated last in his class. Nevertheless, he distinguished himself during the American Civil War, and became a brigadier general at the age of only 23. This was largely due to his fearless aggression in battle, and Custer ended the war as a field major general. Reverting to the rank of lieutenant colonel, he became the commander of the 7th Cavalry in 1866.

Custer was a controversial commander who was initially court-martialed and suspended from duty before being reinstated. He committed a massacre at the Washita River in 1868, and exaggerated reports in the Black Hills to spark a gold rush. This ultimately led to his downfall at the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876. Contemptuous of Sioux fighting ability, Custer split his forces in three and attacked Sitting Bull's camp along the Little Bighorn River. His immediate force was forced back, and Custer was killed along with the men under his direct command.

*Right: Despite being an unmitigated disaster for him personally, 'Custer's Last Stand' and the man himself went down in history*

**"WITH HIS TALENTED VICE-CHIEF CRAZY HORSE, SITTING BULL CONSTANTLY HARASSED US ARMY INCURSIONS INTO SIOUX HUNTING GROUNDS"**



## CRAZY HORSE

1849-77 OGLALA LAKOTA  
THE FORMIDABLE SCOURGE OF THE US ARMY

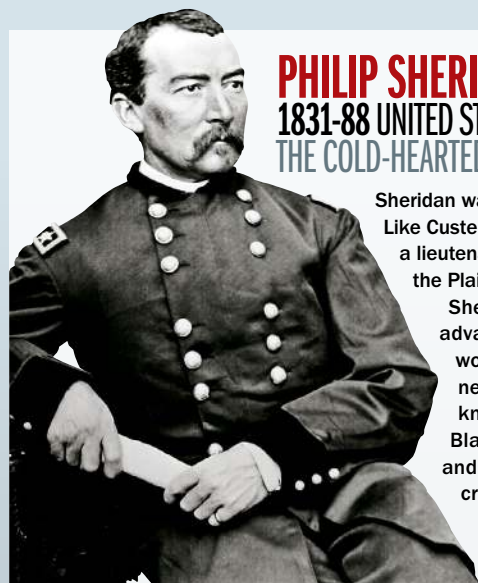
A ferocious warrior, Crazy Horse was committed to preserving the Lakota way of life. He led his first war party before he was 20, and fought during Red Cloud's War, where he took part in the 'Fetterman Fight.' Crazy Horse also defied US reservation provisions by leading his followers into US-held buffalo country to hunt and wage war.

He soon became an enemy of George A Custer, and attacked him during a surveying expedition in

the Black Hills in 1873. Crazy Horse led the military resistance in the Great Sioux War, and defeated George Crook at the Battle of the Rosebud. He then joined forces with Sitting Bull, and commanded the northern flank at the Battle of the Little Bighorn.

Crazy Horse continued to harass punitive US forces during the winter of 1876-77, but was eventually forced to surrender in May 1877. He was later arrested and bayoneted en route to imprisonment.

*Right: The famous carving of Crazy Horse is found on the opposing, arguably more famous side of Mount Rushmore*



## PHILIP SHERIDAN

1831-88 UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
THE COLD-HEARTED GENERAL WHO DESPISED NATIVE AMERICANS

Sheridan was a ruthless soldier who forced the Native Americans of the Plains onto reservations using total war tactics. Like Custer, he was a poor cadet at West Point, but the American Civil War made his reputation. Beginning the war as a lieutenant he ended as a major general and commander the Union cavalry. Sheridan was later ordered to pacify the Plains in four major wars during the 1860s and 70s.

Sheridan believed the strategy of attacking Native American camps during winter would give US forces an advantage, and he did not care for non-combatant casualties. He coldly stated, "If a village is attacked and women and children killed, the responsibility is not with the soldiers, but with the people whose crimes necessitated the attack." This heartless strategy came to fruition in 1868 with the massacre known as the 'Battle of Washita River', when Sheridan ordered Custer to attack Black Kettle's camp. For Sheridan, the massacre was a means to an end, and persuaded other Native Americans to surrender. By the 1880s, his cruel strategy had prevailed at great cost.

*Left: Sheridan has become infamous for declaring, "the only good Indians I ever saw were dead" – a quote he always denied saying*

## RED CLOUD

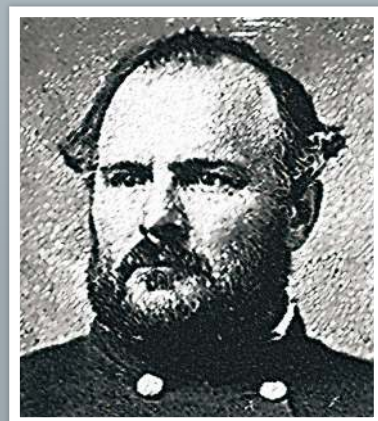
1822-1909 OGLALA LAKOTA  
THE GREAT CHIEF WHO WON A WAR AGAINST THE USA

Red Cloud was one of the most important Lakota leaders of the Plains Wars, and was renowned for his victorious confrontations with the USA. Having learned the art of war from fighting neighbouring Pawnee and Crow enemies, Red Cloud became prominent among the Lakota. From 1866-68, he fought the most successful conflict ever pursued against the USA by the Native American nation: 'Red Cloud's War'.

Fearing the expulsion of the Lakota from Minnesota, Red Cloud attacked newly constructed US Army forts along the Bozeman Trail, and notably

destroyed a column of troops outside Fort Phil Kearny in what became known as the 'Fetterman Fight'. This was the worst defeat of US forces during the Plains Wars before the Battle of the Little Bighorn. The fort garrisons feared further attacks for months afterwards, and the US government eventually agreed to the Treaty of Fort Laramie in 1868. Remarkably, the USA had to abandon its forts along the Bozeman Trail and guarantee Lakota territory. Red Cloud's achievement was a unique victory, but the humiliated US government would soon return.

*Right: Although he eventually had to submit to US government authority in later life, Red Cloud continued to defend Native American culture and preserve the authority of chiefs*



## JOHN CHIVINGTON

1821-94 UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
THE BRUTAL INSTIGATOR OF THE SAND CREEK MASSACRE

Chivington was initially a Methodist minister and contemptuous of slavery. He fought passionately for the Union as a major during the American Civil War, and was hailed as a hero for his role in the victory at the Battle of Glorieta Pass. However, his sympathies for slaves did not extend to Native Americans, and

*Left: Chivington's views on Native Americans were extreme, "Damn any man who sympathizes with Indians! I believe it is right and honourable to use any means to kill Indians."*

his views bordered on genocidal. In August 1864 he declared, "The Cheyenne will have to be roundly whipped – or completely wiped out – before they will be quiet. I say that if any are caught in your vicinity, the only thing to do is kill them."

Chivington acted on his hatred and led a force of Colorado Volunteers to attack a Cheyenne and Arapaho village at Sand Creek on 29 November 1864. Hundreds of Native Americans were killed, approximately two thirds of them women and children. The bodies were subsequently mutilated and exhibited as trophies in Denver. Although he was initially praised for his actions, Chivington was subsequently criticised by Congress, who described the 'Sand Creek Massacre' as "a cowardly and cold-blooded slaughter." Chivington was forced to leave the militia and politics.

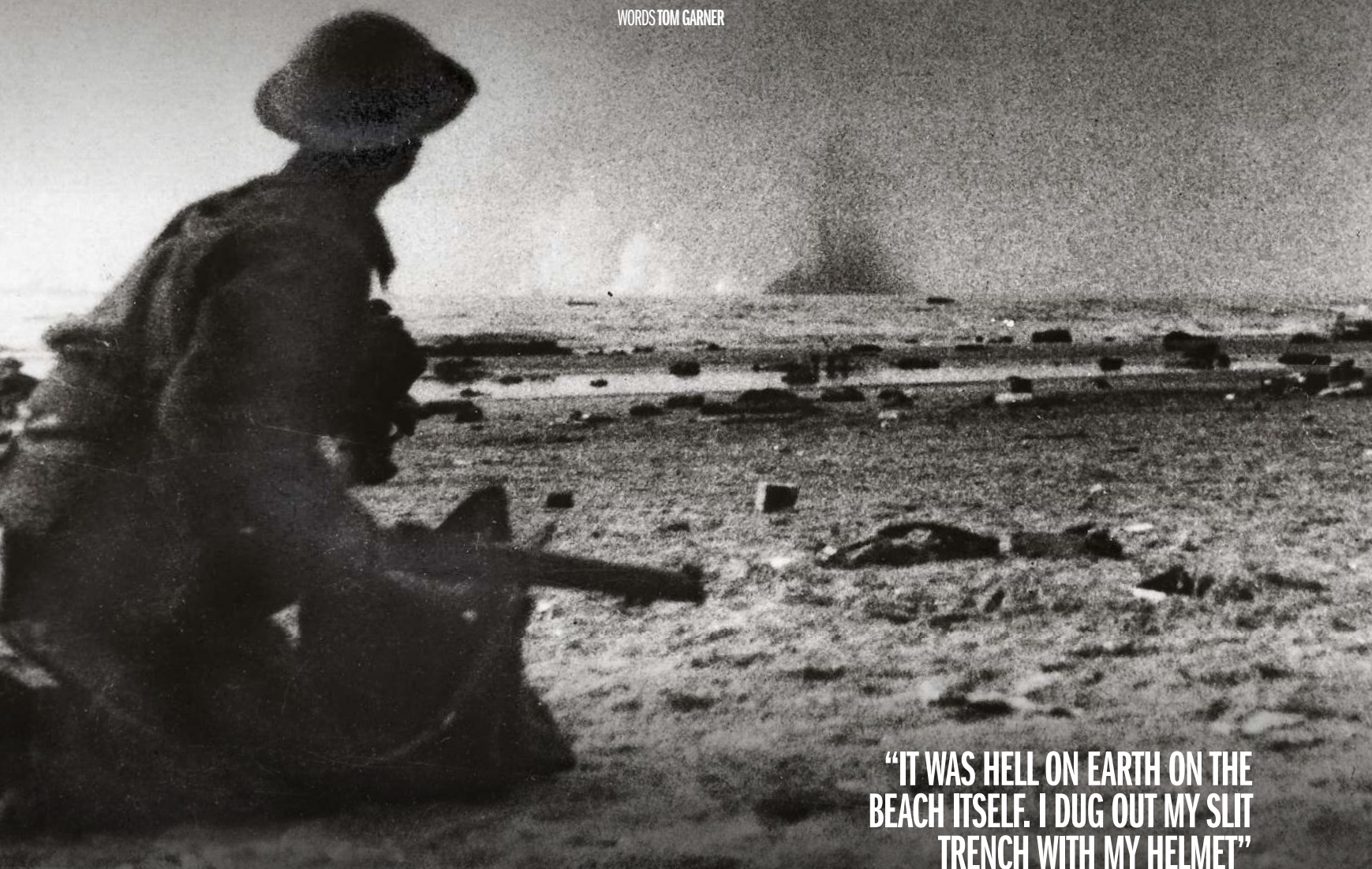


# UNSUNG HEROES BEHIND THE “MIRACLE”

# DUNKERQUE


GARTH WRIGHT TELLS HIS ASTONISHING TALE OF SURVIVAL AND RESCUE  
DURING ONE OF THE LARGEST EVACUATIONS IN MILITARY HISTORY

WORDS TOM GARNER



“IT WAS HELL ON EARTH ON THE  
BEACH ITSELF. I DUG OUT MY SLIT  
TRENCH WITH MY HELMET”





**S**ummer, 1940, and on a beach in northern France hundreds of thousands of Allied troops are stranded – literally squeezed into the sea by the German Blitzkrieg. Among the sand dunes is a 20-year-old despatch rider of the British Expeditionary Force who attempts to shelter from the relentless bombardment of Luftwaffe air attacks. His only defence is a mere slit trench that he has dug out with his own tin helmet. Sand is blown high in the sky all around him and the noise is deafening. The young soldier has already experienced a litany of grim incidents on the road to the beach, but he now wearily becomes resigned to the fact that he may not survive another 24 hours. Only a miracle can save him now.

The scene of this carnage was a place that changed the course of history: Dunkirk. Between 27 May-4 June 1940, over 338,000 British, French, Canadian and Belgian troops, among others, were successfully evacuated against huge odds in over 900 vessels, the majority of them privately owned.

After the horror of the Battle of France the evacuation became instantly iconic and epitomised Britain's resolve to continue fighting Nazi Germany no matter what the cost. One of the evacuated soldiers was the beleaguered despatch rider: gunner Garth Wright. Now aged 97, Wright is a living symbol of the "Dunkirk spirit", and 77 years after his brutal experiences in France he tells the moving story of both his and his army's remarkable survival.

### 'Basic' training

Born on 13 August, 1919, Wright, a native of Devon, joined the British Army before war broke out with some of his friends. "I joined around June-July 1939. When I joined up there were five of us originally. There was myself, Ken Stephens, Roger "Reg" Palmer, Harry Anderson and Peter Dodd – we were brothers-in-arms. We were very close friends before the war and went across as one when war broke out."

Wright and his friends joined 153 Battery, 51st Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, Royal Artillery, and he initially trained as a motorcycle despatch rider. However, his training in Devon was rudimentary. "There were Bofors 40mm anti-aircraft guns pulled by a tractor, which I drove. I was a despatch driver to start with and I finished up as a tractor driver! Our basic training consisted of going up to Plasterdown on a Sunday and we'd have perhaps one gun up there. Somebody would run around among the gorse bushes and suddenly pop up with his hat in the air and the sergeant would give the target bearings. That was virtually the only training we had before we went into serious action in 1940. It was very, very basic indeed."

Wright heard Neville Chamberlain's announcement that war had been declared on the radio during a church service at Tavistock Guildhall. Despite the enthusiasm of others Wright remembers feeling uneasy. "Some of the boys cheered, and at the time I wondered what they were cheering at because I knew then that it wasn't going to be a short affair. We were in for a pretty long haul, which indeed it was."

Events moved quickly for 153 Battery. "It was a Sunday morning when war was declared. We were then on our bikes. We set off for Avonmouth on the Monday morning and we left a lot of the young lads and the older boys behind. We just had a skeleton battery made up of people of the sort of age that would be

**"AT NIGHT THERE WAS A RED GLOW IN THE SKY. BY DAY THE OIL TANKS WERE ONE OF THE GERMANS' FIRST TARGETS & THERE WAS A BLACK POOL OF SMOKE A MILE HIGH DRIFTING ALONG"**

*Below: Garth Wright (front row, far right on floor) with other members of 153 Battery, 51st Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment at Vitry-en-Artois, France, November 1939. Among the troops are his friends Harry Anderson, Peter Dodd and Owen Kelloway: only Wright and Kelloway survived the war*



*"Hell on Earth". British infantry shooting at German aircraft during the evacuation, June 1940. Luftwaffe attacks were relentless at Dunkirk*



## UNSUNG HEROES BEHIND THE “MIRACLE”

expected to go to the front.” Nevertheless, seasoned soldiers soon joined Wright. “We went up to Thursley camp to pick up some more vehicles, a couple more guns and also some reservists that had already done their 21 years in India. About a third of our battery was made up of these old sweats who’d done their time.”

### The shadow of WWI

The battery was soon shipped out from Avonmouth, and Wright landed with the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) at Saint-Nazaire on the French Atlantic coast, where he received a cultural shock. “We were greeted by a meal from the French boys – they were dishing out bowls of soup. I questioned the soup and said, “Is this horse?” They almost gave me a wallop with the ladle so I thought I better keep my mouth shut and eat up!”

Wright was transported through France and eventually arrived close to the Belgian border where he was primarily located at Seclin aerodrome near Lille. His main task was the defence of the airport, but one of his assignments was eerily grim. “Wherever we went we dug in and used our guns: that was the basic job to do. I was digging out a gun pit at Merville, and every shovel full of earth that came up had a memento of a terrible battle from WWI: cap badges, buttons and little bits of bone. What a terrible war that must have been. Farmers were going around taking out shells and unexploded stuff, just parking it beside the field. I could see massive things such as artillery pieces. It was everywhere.”

Wright was posted in the Seclin area for months between late 1939 and early 1940, but

his “phoney war” would change irrevocably with the sudden German invasion of France in May.

### Blitzkrieg

On 10 May, 1940, German forces swept through the Netherlands and Belgium, with the Dutch surrendering four days later. The Allies attempted to push into Belgium but were forced back and the Germans entered France on 13 May through the Ardennes Forest near Sedan. Despite stiff resistance, Panzer tanks broke out and raced towards the English Channel with extensive Luftwaffe air support. The vanguard reached the Channel on 20 May and the Allies were now cut in two. The BEF was still largely based on the French-Belgian border, but despite their fierce opposition to the relentless onslaught, the BEF and other Allied troops were forced back to an area of the French coast that focused around the port of Dunkirk.

What the Allies were experiencing was ‘blitzkrieg’, and for men like Wright who were on the receiving end, the German attack was a shock. “The Germans set off with their blitzkrieg lightning strike, and it was indeed! It came through us like a dose of salts – coming down and circling us in no time, and the roads were choked up with refugees and civilians.”

Wright recalls how unprepared the Allies were. “It was really frightening. It was men against boys really – they’d had armoured experience on other fields of war in Poland and Czechoslovakia. We weren’t prepared for that sort of warfare and the French in particular were still horse-drawn. We were not much in advance of them at all. It was a blitzkrieg all right.”

Now in full retreat towards Dunkirk, both soldiers and civilian refugees fled from the Germans and the result was chaos. “The refugees choked the roads, and to make matters worse, the Germans came down with their Me109s strafing them. The refugees, poor devils, were killed or choking the roads. You couldn’t move. If we did try any manoeuvre or try to put up a fight we couldn’t have done it, and the Germans had no interest in life; they just rolled right through them.”

Wright’s main problems from the air were Junkers Ju 87 ‘Stuka’ dive-bombers. “A lot of people pooh-poohed the Stuka but by God it was an effective plane. It was sure to hit the target; you just aimed the plane. The only target the gunner on the ground had was a little thin line coming down. You could see the bomb leave the plane and you knew damn well that it was going to land directly on your gun. What do

**“THE REFUGEES CHOKED THE ROADS, AND TO MAKE MATTERS WORSE, THE GERMANS CAME DOWN WITH THEIR ME109S STRAFING THEM. THE REFUGEES, POOR DEVILS, WERE KILLED OR CHOKING THE ROADS. YOU COULDN’T MOVE”**



**Above:** War refugees on a French road. The roads to Dunkirk were choked with soldiers and fleeing civilians



**Above:** Garth Wright was trained on the Swedish-built Bofors 40mm anti-aircraft multipurpose auto-cannon



**Above:** Burning oil tanks at Dunkirk, late May, 1940

**Below:** Huge lines of troops assemble in snaking queues while awaiting evacuation in one of the most iconic images from Operation Dynamo



# GUNNER WRIGHT'S PERILOUS MOTORCYCLE ROUTE

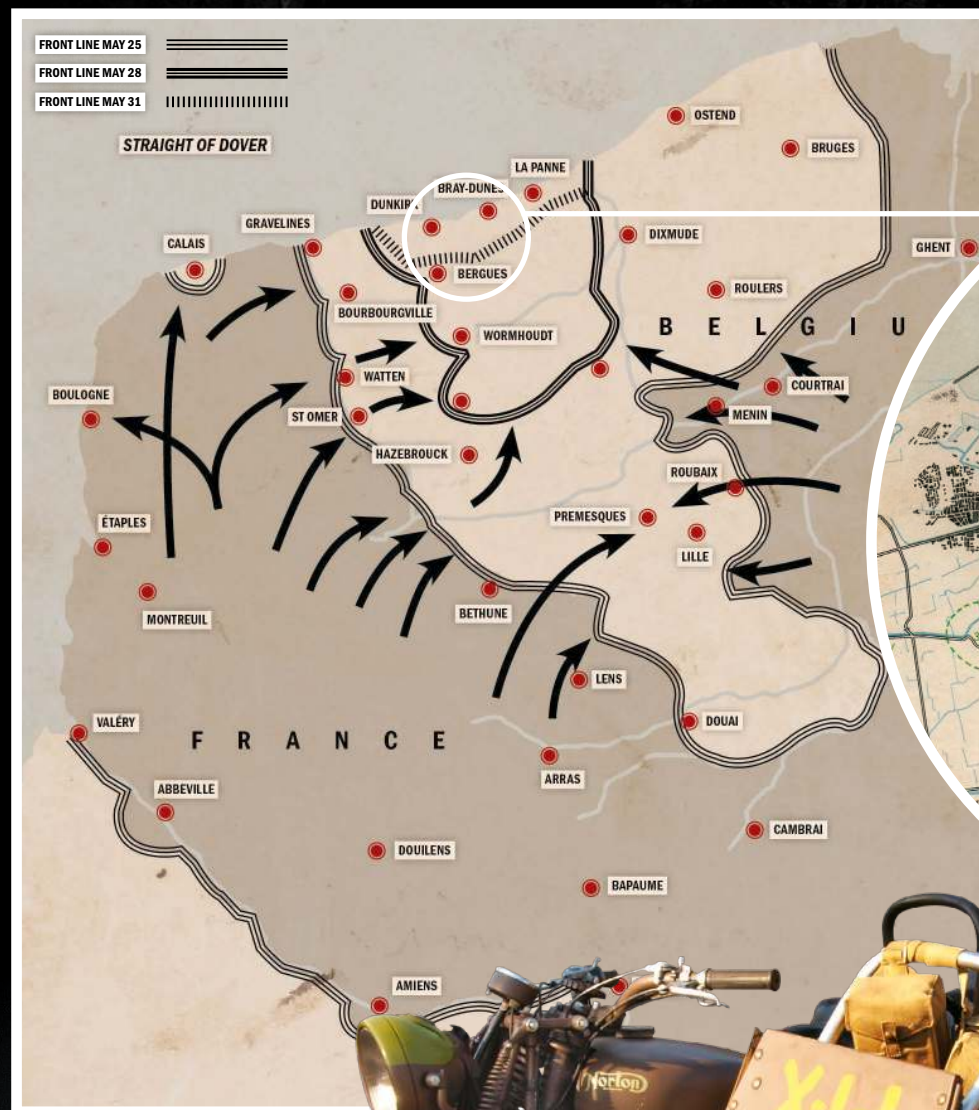
A VITAL CONNECTION BETWEEN HQ AND THE TROOPS, WRIGHT RISKED A SNIPER'S BULLET TO HELP THE EVACUATION

As a gunner in the Royal Artillery, Garth Wright assisted with the hasty defence of the BEF in the area around Dunkirk. His specific task was to act as a despatch rider between the British headquarters in Dunkirk and the outlying guns at Bray-Dunes, another important place of embarkation. His route ran along a canal, which was most likely the Canal

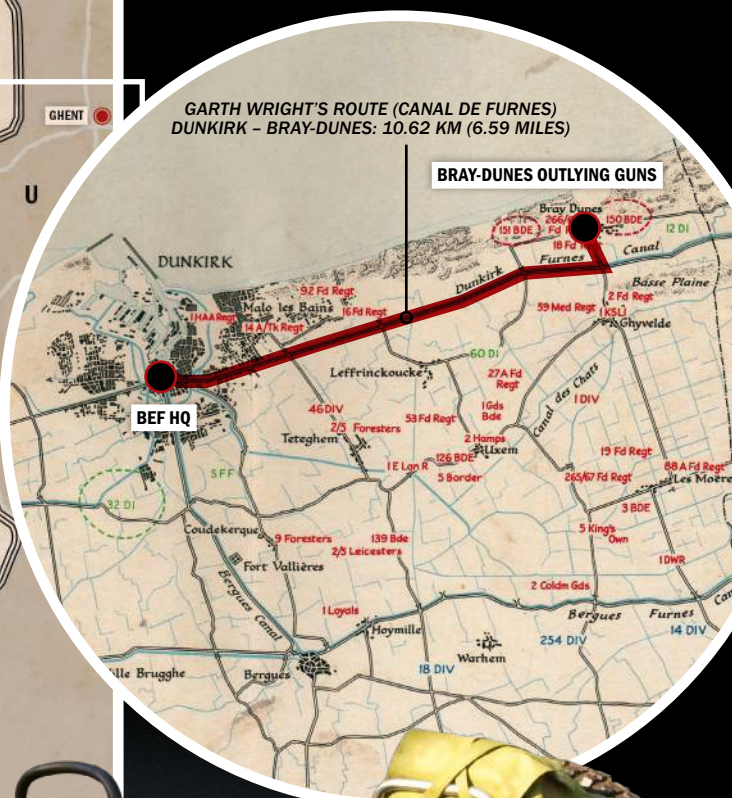
de Furnes, and he would have had to travel around 10.62 kilometres (6.59 miles) each way.

Wright would have performed this dangerous task on motorcycles such as the Norton WD (War Department) Big 4 and Norton WD 16H. Initially designed between 1907 and 1911 respectively, the Big 4 and 16H were first supplied to the British

Armed Forces during the 1930s and were used for despatch riding, training, reconnaissance, convoys and escort duties. Although they could reach a top speed of 109 km/h (68 mph) Wright recalls that he could not reach 80.4 km/h (50mph) while riding at Dunkirk. Over a 48-hour period a German sniper twice shot at Wright.

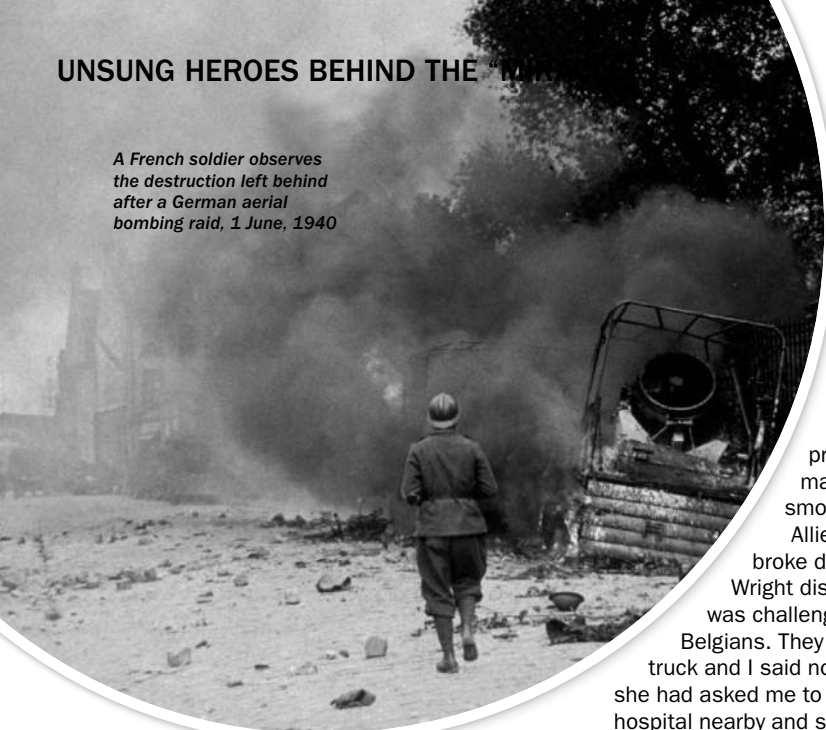


**"IT WAS REALLY FRIGHTENING. IT WAS MEN AGAINST BOYS"**



Right: Norton Motorcycle Company produced over 100,000 motorcycles for the British war effort during WWII, including 4,700 of the 'Big 4' model that hauled sidecars





A French soldier observes the destruction left behind after a German aerial bombing raid, 1 June, 1940

**"I WAS DIGGING OUT A GUN PIT AT MERVILLE AND EVERY SHOVEL FULL OF EARTH THAT CAME UP HAD A MEMENTO OF A TERRIBLE BATTLE FROM WWI: CAP BADGES, BUTTONS AND LITTLE BITS OF BONE. WHAT A TERRIBLE WAR THAT MUST HAVE BEEN"**

you do? Scarper, or do you stick it out? Well of course it was pretty frightening."

## A chaotic retreat

During the offensive Wright found himself alone at one point while driving a truck and had a close encounter with enemy troops. "I went down to the HQ at Amiens and on the way back I got cut off by Jerry. I was on my own. I stopped at a café, got a bottle of booze, sat on the step of the café and as soon as I sat dogs and kids came around. A French boy came up and I gave him a bar of chocolate and we sat together. All of a sudden up ahead at a T-junction a half-track went by with SS on board – they didn't take prisoners, so I thought it was

probably time to move! I made my way back to the smoke at Dunkirk."

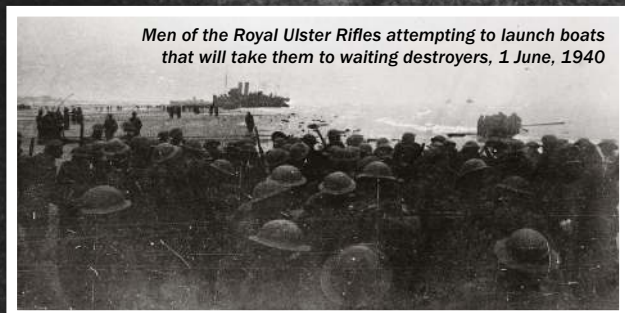
Allied relations sometimes broke down on the retreat, as Wright discovered. "On the way I was challenged by some French or Belgians. They wanted to ride on my truck and I said no. I had a girl on board, she had asked me to take her to a maternity hospital nearby and she was heavily pregnant so I said I would take her there and drop her off. She was sat beside me and they raised their guns. I took out my Tommy gun and said "Right, who's first?" and they backed off. I went on, dropped the girl off and picked the convoy up again."

Following this incident, Wright drove on with a truck laden with RAF supplies, including whisky and cigarettes that he had gathered from an abandoned airfield. The truck became damaged and broke down, and Wright was forced to make a decision. "I picked the convoy up but the bloomin' truck got bogged down. The soldiers nearby said, "Get over this side." There was a bloke in front of me who had a fag on and all of the petrol from the truck was running into the drain. All of my salvaged supplies were

on board this truck and I thought, "Why the devil should anybody else have it?" I let the bloke go on smoking and when he dropped the fag end the whole damn lot went up. All of the supplies, including booze, went up in smoke!"

By now the fires of Dunkirk were visible. "At night there was a red glow in the sky. By day the oil tanks were one of the Germans' first targets and there was a black pool of smoke a mile high drifting along. Jerry used to come through that smoke and drive down onto us."

The BEF was now completely surrounded around Dunkirk and Wright's battery was approaching the town when tragedy struck him personally. "The column was being led in by my friend Ken Stephens who was a despatch rider. The Stukas bombed the head of the column and poor old Ken was blown off his bike and killed by the side of the road. A 1,500-weight truck followed him. Those onboard were all killed and the boy on the tailboards was severely injured." It was a terrible start to a situation that had quickly become nightmarish.



Men of the Royal Ulster Rifles attempting to launch boats that will take them to waiting destroyers, 1 June, 1940



Garth Wright was evacuated on HMS Codrington, a ship that also rescued 4,538 other troops

**"WE WEREN'T PREPARED FOR THAT SORT OF WARFARE"**

The port of Dunkirk shrouded in smoke after German bombing had started fires. Wright remembers seeing a red glow from a distance because of the fire

Right: Garth Wright pictured behind the lines in Tunisia c.1943-44. After Dunkirk, Wright took part in Operation Torch and fought at the Battle of Monte Cassino





# CUT OFF FROM RESCUE

A HUGE PART OF THE BEF REMAINED IN FRANCE TO SUPPORT THE FRENCH ARMY AFTER OPERATION DYNAMO & SUFFERED THE CONSEQUENCES

*Long rows of British and French prisoners-of-war assemble at Dunkirk around 4 June, 1940. For them, Operation Dynamo came too late*



Although the evacuation from Dunkirk was indeed a remarkable achievement it has often been forgotten that tens of thousands of soldiers were left behind. As well as those killed, around 41,000 were reported missing or captured, with a significant proportion of those being two brigades of the 51st Highland Division.

Commanded by Major General Victor Fortune the division had been in France since January 1940 and were stationed at the Ouvrage Hackenberg Fortress in Lorraine on the Maginot Line. Consequently, the Highlanders escaped the subsequent encirclement of the BEF, but it also hindered their escape from France.

The division was attached to the French Tenth Army and pulled back to a new line along the River Somme where it was heavily attacked in the days after Operation Dynamo was completed on 4 June. Between 5-6 June the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders suffered some of the worst casualties in the regiment's history. However, they, and the majority of 154th Brigade, were able to escape from Le Havre during Operation Cycle. Other brigades of the division were not so lucky.

Over 10,000 men of 152nd and 153rd Brigades became trapped with French troops at Saint-Valéry-en-Caux on the Normandy coast and were forced to surrender on 12 June. General Fortune became one of the most senior British officers to be captured during WWII and the defeat of the 51st Division was considered to be the end of Allied resistance during the Battle of France.

Nevertheless, in a display of how tenacious the Highlanders could be, out of the 290 British POWs who successfully escaped home to Britain by June 1941, 134 were members of the 51st Division.



*A soldier from the Cameron Highlanders looks through a periscope in the Fort de Sainghain on the Maginot Line, 3 November, 1939*



**"THE DEFEAT OF THE 51ST DIVISION WAS CONSIDERED TO BE THE END OF ALLIED RESISTANCE DURING THE BATTLE OF FRANCE"**



**"IT WAS SO DAMN FRIGHTENING THAT I WAS BEGINNING TO WISH THAT THE NEXT ATTACK WOULD BE MY LAST. I THOUGHT, 'I'M NOT GOING TO GET OUT OF THIS SO LET'S GET THIS OVER WITH'"**

*'The Withdrawal from Dunkirk, June 1940' by Charles Cundall. He was an official war artist and based his painting on photographs and eyewitness accounts*









POWs being marched away from the beaches of Dunkirk to a German internment camp. These were the men who covered the Allied evacuation

## THE MEN LEFT BEHIND

MILITARY HISTORIAN AND AUTHOR SEAN LONGDEN DISCUSSES THE HEROIC REARGUARD ACTIONS THAT COVERED OPERATION DYNAMO AND THE TERRIBLE CONDITIONS THAT ALLIED SOLDIERS ENDURED IN CAPTIVITY



### HOW IMPORTANT WERE THE REARGUARD ACTIONS FOR THE SUCCESS OF OPERATION DYNAMO?

They were absolutely vital: without the rearguard the evacuation just couldn't have happened. All the way through the retreat from Belgium and

northern France there were well-organised defensive lines such as rivers and canals. Individual units continually retreated and defended and that was essential in stalling the German advance.

Holding at places like Mont des Cats and Cassel were important, particularly because of the importance of high ground in what is an incredibly flat landscape. It's perfect defensive countryside and criss-crossed with canals and drainage ditches. The proof of that is when you look at what happened to the German garrison at Dunkirk in 1944-45: they were just bypassed. The British made the decision to just besiege Dunkirk and not to try and attack the town. That tells you a lot about why the Germans didn't choose to finish off the British in 1940.

### HOW DID THE 51ST HIGHLAND DIVISION BECOME DETACHED FROM THE BEF BEFORE IT WAS SUBSEQUENTLY STRANDED IN FRANCE AFTER THE EVACUATION?

It's often talked about the willing 'sacrifice' of the division, but quite simply the reason they get stuck in France is that they're not part of the main retreat and evacuation. At the time of the German attack they were serving further south alongside the French in the Maginot Line. When the attack comes in they were geographically not there. Their withdrawal is on a line heading west: they're not withdrawing to the northwest like everyone else so when the Germans cut the British off they are south of that line.

I interviewed veterans from the 51st and they weren't aware of what was going on elsewhere; all they knew about was what was going on in their zone. They knew things were bad and that there was a retreat but they didn't have form or understanding outside of their own area. By the time the 51st engaged again the evacuation was pretty much over, but they fought on and sacrificed in the same way as everyone else did.

### DID SOME ALLIED SOLDIERS MANAGE TO EVADE CAPTURE AFTER DUNKIRK?

Whole units were cut off and a lot of people headed along the coast to find fishing vessels to see if they could sail home. That became increasingly difficult once the Germans were fully in occupation but some people did manage it.

There were large numbers of men who walked across country and kept hiding. Others went and lived in villages and waited before getting false documents. If they could get into Vichy France things became a lot easier. Some went off to the US embassy in Paris and the Americans would often help by supplying papers.

Crossing the Pyrenees into Spain was one route, but it wasn't that simple getting to Gibraltar because vast numbers of men ended up in camps in Spain, where they were very badly treated.

There was one British sergeant who managed to get to North Africa and then travelled down West Africa before arriving at a British garrison. He turned up, explained his situation and said, "Here I am, I'm reporting for duty. I was left in France and have walked down half of Africa!"

It's hard to verify but certainly more than hundreds managed to escape. In February 1941, a report reached London from Belgium suggesting that there was possibly up to 1,000 British soldiers hiding in villages around Brussels. In April 1941, 13 Belgians were tried for harbouring British troops. There was another figure of 5,000 believed to be hiding in the Pas-de-Calais. There was a complete mix of stories from that period.

### WHAT WERE CONDITIONS LIKE FOR NEWLY CAPTURED POWS?

Of all the people I have interviewed about being captured that year every one had a bad time to varying degrees. I've never met anyone who said, "It was absolutely fine." For a start they had to deal with the shock of being captured. A lot of them had nothing; they had lost their kit and might not even have water bottles, mess tins, cutlery or blankets.

There were no efforts made to help these men; they went into captivity with what they had. Many ended up marching 20-30 miles a day, so those who did have kit soon abandoned it.

Exhaustion was the main thing. If anyone stepped out of line they were beaten by the German guards in large numbers. Men who did try to escape or

even just ran off to a pump or horse troughs to get some water were shot. Virtually everybody that I interviewed about going into captivity had memories of people just being shot for disobeying the Germans. It was utterly awful for them.

Also, it was an incredibly long period to be in captivity. In that initial period they had no idea whether the British were completely defeated or how long the war would last – they were completely cut off from the world.

Although many eventually made the best of their situation the mental scars of their captivity were very significant. I don't think any POW, no matter how long or short their captivity is, escapes without being mentally scarred.

### WHY DO YOU THINK THE SUFFERINGS OF THE MEN LEFT BEHIND HAVE BEEN LARGELY FORGOTTEN?

In 1940 the story of those left behind just did not fit the brief. Right from the beginning it was necessary to celebrate the evacuation because the future for the British was based on that escape. For the people left behind it was really unfortunate that the necessities of the time meant that all the publicity had to go on turning what was an awful defeat into some measure of victory.

Afterwards there were some fantastic memoirs that came out but they weren't necessarily the most successful. It was very difficult for people to talk honestly and openly about how awful their experiences had been. For instance, I don't think the publishing world in 1950 wanted to know the depths of what those men went through. If you had presented the truth at that time they just couldn't have handled it.

## DUNKIRK: THE MEN THEY LEFT BEHIND

Sean Longden is the author of *Dunkirk: The Men They Left Behind*. Published by Constable & Robinson, the book is available to buy on Amazon at: [www.amazon.co.uk/Dunkirk-Men-They-Left-Behind](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Dunkirk-Men-They-Left-Behind)





### “Hell on Earth”

Dunkirk in May 1940 was a scene of chaos. During the spring, BEF numbers in France had grown to a peak of 400,000 and tens of thousands had already been killed during the blitzkrieg offensive. The bulk of the BEF, the remnants of three French armies and a contingent of Belgian forces now converged on the defensive perimeter set up around the port. Dunkirk was the longest uninterrupted beach in that sector of the Channel coast and the largest port with suitable facilities to aid a final evacuation by sea. It was also located in a marshy area that could potentially aid its defence. Courageous defensive actions were fought at Calais and Boulogne among other places in order to buy valuable time for the evacuation preparations.

Astonishingly, Adolf Hitler refused requests for the Luftwaffe to completely destroy the Allies at Dunkirk and halted ground attacks for around 48 hours. This gave the British valuable time to proceed properly with the evacuation, which was codenamed Operation Dynamo.

Between 26 May-4 June 1940, hundreds of thousands of troops waited on the beaches to be evacuated. However, as a member of the Royal Artillery, Wright still had defensive duties

### “THEY TOOK ME DOWN THE LOCAL PUB AND I FELT AWFUL. I FELT LIKE A COWARD BECAUSE OLD BOYS FROM WWI WERE BUYING ME DRINKS AS IF I WAS SOME SORT OF HERO”

to carry out. “We went into Dunkirk and kept on the move, giving what cover we could for the evacuation. We had to keep on the move all the time, keeping mobile up and down the beaches, getting into action and trying to give Jerry as much as he was giving us. We didn’t do a bad job.”

As a trained motorcyclist, Wright had to take over his dead friend’s duties. “When Ken (Stephens) was killed he was the despatch rider and we had no other riders around, so I took over the job keeping in touch with the outlying guns. I did that for 48 hours or so between what we had for a headquarters in Dunkirk to the outlying guns around Bray-Dunes.”

During these motorcycle missions Wright came under fire from a German sniper. “I used to have to go along the canal and you could only get 49mph (78.9 km/h) out of the old thing. I used to head down and just pray because a sniper had a go at me twice and once hit the frame of the bike. The bullet pinged and glanced off and I could see it on the frame. It was one of my more worrying moments of the war.”

After around two days performing despatch-riding duties, Wright then spent a day on Dunkirk beach sheltering among the sand dunes. Conditions were horrendous. “It was hell on Earth on the beach itself. I dug out my slit trench with my helmet. The Germans timed bombing attacks every half hour. They would come over strafing with Me109s and bomb us with Stukas. You could set your watch on the tick of every half hour through daylight hours. Nothing happened at night, but as soon as dawn broke, until sunset, they were over. It was so damn frightening that I was beginning to wish that the next attack would be my last. I thought, ‘I’m not going to get out of this so let’s get this over with.’ I honestly felt that way – it was terrifying.”

Although he was theoretically highly exposed on the beach Wright believes it may have helped save his life. “A lot of the bombs went into the

Abandoned vehicles on a beach at De Panne, Belgium. The BEF alone was forced to abandon 63,879 vehicles after the German invasion



Below: A flotilla of small boats, each heavily loaded with evacuated troops. Garth Wright recalls feeling apprehensive about escaping Dunkirk aboard the ‘little ships’

A British soldier shoots at an attacking German aircraft lying down at Dunkirk beach while German bombs explode all around



French destroyer FR Bourrasque sinking after hitting a mine on the way back from Dunkirk. Approximately 1,200 men were on board and many died





## UNSUNG HEROES BEHIND THE “MIRACLE”

soft sand and the blast went upwards, whereas if it landed on something solid the blast spread. Dunkirk beach was, in one way, a blessing to us because most of the blast went upwards.”

### Evacuation

Dunkirk became famous for the civilian ‘little ships’ that evacuated the troops. Hundreds of privately owned vessels took part in Operation Dynamo but Wright remembers feeling cautious about the possibility of boarding them. “There were great queues for the little boats and I thought, “I’m not going out and waiting for that.” I just stayed in my trench and waited. I picked the right deal I think but quite a lot got away with the little ships.”

Eventually, amidst the explosions, Wright was given an opportunity to get out. “They shouted for volunteer stretcher-bearers. They say don’t volunteer for anything but I’m damn glad I volunteered for this one! I got up, anything rather than just sitting there waiting to be the next one to be picked off. Me and another guy picked up what was left of this poor (wounded) lad and took him out along the Mole.”

‘East Mole’ was a long stone and concrete jetty running out from Dunkirk’s harbour entrance with another wooden platform extending out to sea. It was 1.2 kilometres long and the point of evacuation for more than two thirds (approximately 200,000) of those rescued in 1940. By the time Wright approached the jetty it had already been under heavy attack. “(The Mole) had been badly bombed but repaired as much as they could so you could still get access to the destroyer laying off there: HMS Codrington. We took this boy aboard the Codrington and put him down but I don’t think he lived long. I went to go back to the slit trench but the captain told me to stay on board. I didn’t argue too much with him and I had a first class trip from Dunkirk to Dover. I consider myself damn lucky that I got away.”

HMS Codrington was an A-Class destroyer and had already seen service during the Norwegian Campaign only weeks earlier. She was transferred to Dover Command for Operation Dynamo on 27 May, and between 28 May-2 June the ship evacuated 4,538 troops over seven trips from Dunkirk, including Wright.

Unlike most of the other destroyers involved in the evacuation, HMS Codrington was spared major damage despite sustained air attacks and was able to continue support duties after Dynamo was completed on 4 June.

### A costly ‘miracle’

The evacuation of Dunkirk was a remarkable piece of military improvisation. It had initially been estimated that only 45,000 troops could be rescued in two days but in the event over 338,000 soldiers were successfully evacuated in an operation lasting nine days. Of these men 221,504 belonged to the BEF and a further 122,000 were mostly French or Belgian. The sheer number of troops that escaped meant that Britain could fight on and the boost to national morale was considerable.

However, it should never be forgotten that Operation Dynamo was the result of a colossal Allied defeat. The human cost alone during the Battle of France was huge. British casualties amounted to 66,426 with 11,000 killed, 14,000 wounded and over 41,000 reported missing or captured. Belgian casualties were

**“IT SHOULD NEVER BE FORGOTTEN THAT OPERATION DYNAMO WAS THE RESULT OF A COLOSSAL ALLIED DEFEAT. THE HUMAN COST ALONE DURING THE BATTLE OF FRANCE WAS HUGE”**





23,350, while the French suffered a staggering 90,000 killed, 200,000 wounded and 1.8 million soldiers captured. The material costs for the BEF were also severe, with the equipment lost including 63,879 vehicles, 20,548 motorcycles, 77,318 tonnes of ammunition and 423,630 tonnes of stores. 236 naval ships had been sunk or destroyed and the RAF lost 177 aircraft in nine days. Hundreds more aeroplanes had already been lost during the Battle of France and the frontline home strength of Fighter Command was reduced to 331 fighters, with only 36 left in reserve. This was a perilous situation for the imminent Battle of Britain.

The Germans had also suffered grievous casualties of 156,000, but the starkest fact remained that continental Western Europe had rapidly fallen to its knees in the face of a seemingly unstoppable German onslaught. Winston Churchill knew the situation was perilous and warned the House of Commons on 4 June, "We must be very careful not to assign to this deliverance the attributes of a victory. Wars are not won by evacuations."

Once he was safely back in England, Wright was sent with the remainder of the artillery to Woolwich and given 24 hours leave to visit relatives in Walthamstow. "They took me down the local pub and I felt awful. I felt like a coward because old boys from WWI were buying me drinks as if I was some sort of hero. Some had been gassed or were limbless and I felt like a coward that had run away. That was honestly my feelings; they were the people that I looked up to and I felt that I had run away and was a coward compared to them. But there you are, that's war."

However, despite his experiences in France, Wright does not blame his superiors for the Allied defeat. "We were all in the same boat; we just weren't ready for that type of warfare."

Wright would go on to serve during the Battle of Britain defending fighter airfields in southeast England and subsequently served in North Africa as part of Operation Torch. He then fought in the Italian Campaign at the Battle of Monte Cassino before ending his war advancing through northern Italy into Austria. He had fought the Germans for the entire war but he is

magnanimous towards his former enemy. "I had a sneaking regard for Jerry: the old Wehrmacht German soldier. The ordinary German was just the same as us but the SS were a different crowd. They were nasty devils, but we had some funny ones too."

Dunkirk was a crucial moment of WWII and Churchill tentatively recognised its importance on 4 June, 1940, when he stated, "There was a victory inside this deliverance, which should be noted." Soon afterwards the evacuation began to be referred to as a 'miracle' by the British people. It is a sentiment that Wright readily agrees with.

"I think it was-we came away to fight another day. It was only 338,000 of us that got away but it was the nucleus of the British Army. There's a TV programme now called *SS-GB* whose plot is that the Germans had indeed overrun us and what it would have been like here (in Britain). It's pretty gory, the way they just lift up a girl and shoot her in the head and throw her down. I think that's the sort of life that we would have had if it wasn't for the miracle of Dunkirk."



The ruins of Dunkirk after fighting had ceased. Hundreds of thousands of troops had been squeezed into a cramped area and the small town suffered huge damage



British soldiers dive to the ground at Dunkirk beach while under attack. Garth Wright recalls the sand would send the bomb blast upwards



Above: A wounded French soldier being taken ashore on a stretcher at Dover after his evacuation



Above, right: Exhausted British troops aboard a train, having returned home from Dunkirk. Wright recalls feeling "awful" after his evacuation

THE ROYAL BRITISH  
LEGION

## ROYAL BRITISH LEGION

Garth Wright is a member and beneficiary of the Royal British Legion, the United Kingdom's largest Armed Forces charity. It upholds the memory of the fallen and provides lifelong support for the Armed Forces community including serving men and women, veterans and their families. For further information about the Legion, its services and how to get involved visit: [www.britishlegion.org.uk](http://www.britishlegion.org.uk)





# AFRICA'S MERCENARY MISSIONS

## PART I

WORDS AL VENTER

**"EXECUTIVE OUTCOMES  
PERSONNEL WENT  
WHERE NO ONE ELSE  
WOULD GO, TO DO A  
JOB THAT NO ONE ELSE  
WOULD DO, TO END (FOR  
A TIME) TWO SENSELESS  
AFRICAN WARS"**

- Author James R Davies: *Private Armies  
and the New World Order: Canada, 2001*



# THE RISE OF MODERN PRIVATE ARMIES

The private military company (PMC) syndrome has grown into a major industry, made up of professional 'guns for hire'



**T**hings were not going well in Nigeria in 2015. Its military was fighting a war against a powerful force of Boko Haram *Jihadis* – as it is still doing today. Then suddenly, things began to change. That came after the government of West Africa's superpower secretly approached a group of former South African mercenaries to gather together a force of former Executive Outcomes (EO) professional soldiers to see if they could sort out the mess. Nigeria did so knowing that South African law does not permit its nationals to fight in foreign wars.

Since EO has an 'alumni' network that stretches all the way across Africa and remains strong today, the new combat unit - only 75 strong, including an Air Wing with helicopter gunships - were ready to roll within weeks. Their numbers included many former SADF personnel - black and white - quite a few in their fifties and some even older. Almost all had subsequently served with EO in Angola and Sierra Leone. Most international news reports at the time spoke of a foreign force of several hundreds...

Effectively, said one of them, "I think the ghost of EO was resurrected. The Nigerian decision to hire our blokes to fight this new form of Islamic terror came at a good time and actually, we did exceptionally well." Though press coverage of conflict was minimal, the international community – and many Nigerians – were stunned.

This tiny group of 'guns for hire' fought for only six months in north-east Nigeria and in that short time achieved more than the Nigerian Army had managed to do in six years of sporadic combat against a powerfully-motivated terrorist force.

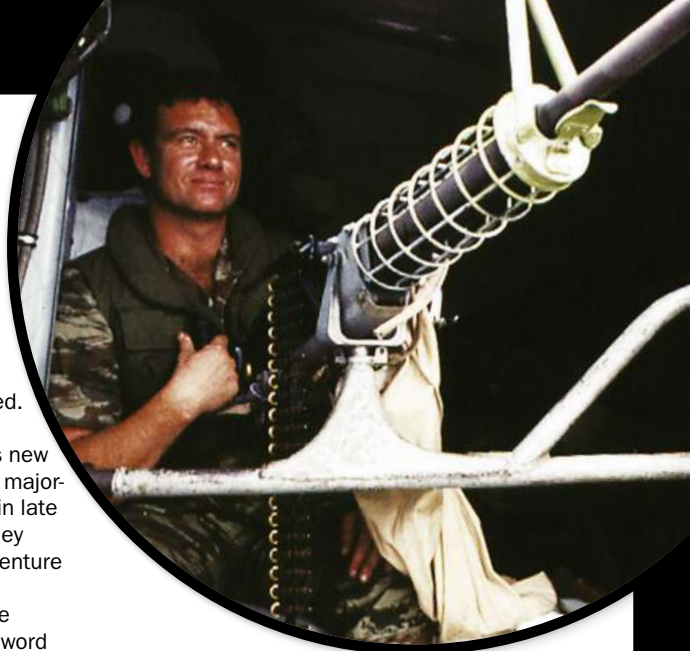
What has since emerged is that the South Africans had a secret. "When we go to war," the author's contact admitted, "we command the night." This was something that had very rarely happened in Nigeria in the past, he disclosed. "So, when the sun set, we left our secure bases and did our thing..." It was apparently something for which Boko Haram was totally unprepared.

Then, almost overnight, South African mercenary participation ended. Nigeria's new president Muhammadu Buhari, a former major-general in the Nigerian Army was sworn in late May 2015 and soon afterwards the money intended to pay EO was stolen and the venture called to a halt.

Buhari was not actually opposed to the mercenary effort because, officially, the word was put out that it was Nigerian troops who were winning the war and not a rogue band of geriatric foreigners. The Nigerian military was involved, but played only a minor, peripheral role, supplying hardware like armoured vehicles and weapons, but little else – their main problem being that they were not prepared for night deployments.

A couple of months later the EO veterans returned home and there is an ongoing dispute as to whether everybody was properly paid.

Since then, an impasse in hostilities has returned and Boko Haram is once again terrorising civilians and kidnapping their daughters. This raises the interesting question: how did a relatively small group of freebooters who originally fought in Angola from 1993 onwards manage to achieve so much in such a short space of time?



**Above:** Mercenary side-gunner on board one of the Mi-17 helicopters operated by Executive Outcomes in Angola (Al Venter photo)

In truth, they were a hand-picked, select group of professional soldiers. The majority had fought for Executive Outcomes in Angola against Dr Jonas Savimbi's UNITA guerrillas from 1993 onwards – and thereafter in Sierra Leone. Moreover, all had seen action, some quite a lot of it. Several had been wounded in action and quite a few decorated for bravery while serving in the SADF.

Interestingly, many senior Executive Outcomes personnel had been in command positions with South Africa's Reconnaissance Regiment (Recces), 32 Battalion or the police anti-terror detachment which went by the name of Koevoet. There was also a significant number

**"THIS TINY GROUP OF 'GUNS FOR HIRE' FOUGHT FOR ONLY SIX MONTHS IN NORTH-EAST NIGERIA AND IN THAT SHORT TIME ACHIEVED MORE THAN THE NIGERIAN ARMY HAD MANAGED TO DO IN SIX YEARS"**

**Below:** UNITA guerilla soldier poses January 23, 1990 near Jamba, Angola



Former South African Army para Cobus Claassens took this shot of an ageing Soviet BMP-2 amphibious fighting vehicle in Sierra Leone





Air-to-ground rocket pod (fixed to a former Soviet Mi-24 gunship) flying low over Sierra Leone's jungle terrain (Al Venter)



Right: A group of South African mercenaries fighting with Executive Outcomes (Al Venter)



Aerial shot of illegal diamond diggings in the African interior (Al Venter)



Below: Three mercenaries await uplifting at Freetown's Aberdeen Barracks. One of the unit's Hinds can be seen (Cobus Claassens)



Below: Former army colonels Hennie Blaauw (right) and Duncan Rykaardt (Al Venter)



Below: One of the few photos to have emerged of the Jihadi group linked to Boko Haram



of them who had served in various Paratroop (airborne) units.

Additionally – and this is what EO recruiters were looking for – officers and NCOs would have achieved 'middle rankings' in their units. Moreover, the company stipulated that South African nationals were preferred and anybody with 'political baggage' or a criminal record was not welcome.

Most important, recruits were expected to work in foreign locations and what was termed 'high risk' environments. Money was always tight, though some combat pilots with EO could earn US \$6,000 a month. General foot soldiers in Executive Outcomes ranks earned a minimum of US \$2,000 a month, though this could progress to double that fairly quickly for specialists and field commanders.

Looking at the broader scenario, some of Executive Outcomes' successes are said by insiders to stem from what the late

Reconnaissance Regiment Colonel Duncan Rykaardt – a senior member of the company's original command group – termed EO's 'Four Interlocking Principles'. These fundamentals included air support for all ground operations, reliance on the individual in the field for good level of personal initiative, basic common sense and good discipline. Finally, there was the logistics issue.

Since most of Executive Outcomes' men had served long and hard in their own country's Border War, they were not unduly taxed by these stipulations. What ultimately took place was dictated as much by the need to run an efficient business as to prevent any loss of life in combat.

The issue is perhaps best encapsulated by the credo, crude but emphatic, that was printed on some of the T-shirts issued to the men at EO's Rio Lomba Special Forces training camp. Emblazoned across the back, in bold Day-Glo

letters four inches high, were the wise words: *Fit in or F\*\*k Off.*

There were few EO ground operations without close air support, a situation routinely observed in Angola where there was never a shortage of government Soviet-supplied Mi-24 helicopter gunships and Mi-17 Hips. These Russian rotor wings were used extensively in just about every punch-up into which the company was involved in Angola and Sierra Leone. Angolan Air Force pilots flew a few of them, while most were piloted by South Africans working for Executive Outcomes.

The second EO canon centred on initiative and good common sense – values for which the majority of Third World forces are not especially renowned. As former Recce Colonel Hennie Blaauw – another EO combat commander in Angola – pointed out markedly: "that sort of thing doesn't feature in the handbooks."

The third element reverted to discipline, enforced with a resolutely strong arm. Anyone who stepped out of line – which excluded getting drunk as many times a week as you liked as long as you weren't smashed on duty – was put on the first plane home.

**"ANYONE WHO STEPPED OUT OF LINE – WHICH EXCLUDED GETTING DRUNK AS MANY TIMES A WEEK AS YOU LIKED AS LONG AS YOU WEREN'T SMASHED ON DUTY – WAS PUT ON THE FIRST PLANE HOME"**



# THE RPG-7

FAVOURITE OF ALL THIRD-WORLD WARS AND ARGUABLY ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL WEAPONS DEVELOPED SINCE THE END OF WWII

The RPG-7 is indisputably the 'ground force weapon of its time'. There are almost no contemporary wars, insurrections or revolutions that do not have it deployed in action. It is sometimes used in an anti-aircraft capacity (RPG-7s were used to down two American Black Hawks in the October 1993 'Battle of Mogadishu'), or to repel ground attacks or possibly as a form of artillery spraying shrapnel over enemy positions.

The author has fired RPGs many times, both on the range and in action in Lebanon when caught short. He has fired French Army Strim M52 rifle grenades, outdated WWII generation American bazookas, as well as M60 anti-tank rifle grenades and rates the versatility of the RPG-7 way ahead of them all.

Lightweight and easy to assemble, it is a remarkably simply device to fire. There is absolutely no recoil and the weapon needs almost no practice to fire. Also, it is completely safe to use (though the handler needs to protect his or her ears because of the initial blast) and at a range of perhaps 75 metres, the average shooter can hit a target the size of a 44 gallon barrel two times out of three.

Additionally, its grenade is designed to self destruct at a range of just over 900 metres (4.5

seconds from launching), which makes it the ideal weapon for low-flying aircraft and helicopters since once fired it moves in at a rate of roughly 100 metres per second.

A modified version, PG-7BR (VR for the RPG-7V1) was designed in an anti-tank capacity with a precursor charge, first to eliminate the reactive armour and a secondary charge to penetrate the main armour.

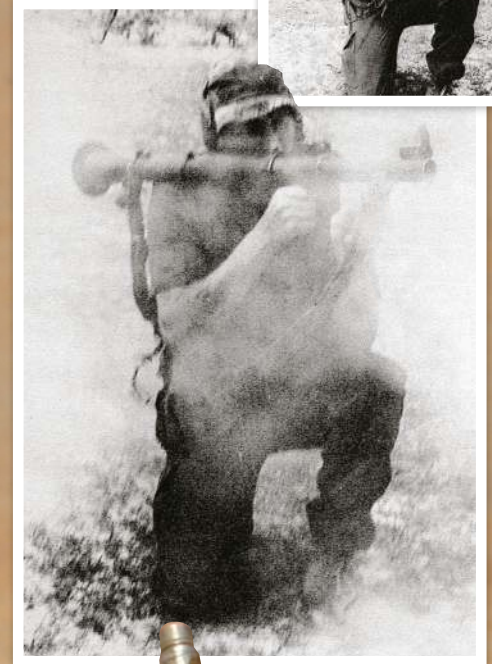
Although its standard-fitted iron sights are mostly used, the Soviets did offer more sophisticated sighting mechanism which can be clipped onto the barrel.

Because it requires about 4Gs to activate (on being fired) the RPG-7 very rarely – if ever – detonates accidentally.

The author was travelling through Mozambique at the end of that war when we reached a roadblock. While waiting to be checked through, an army truck passed and hurled a bag of about 30 RPG projectiles onto the ground immediately ahead of us, obviously intending to resupply the ground troops.

Had the impact of striking the ground within a metre of the right front wheel caused a single one in this fairly heavy parcel of explosives to detonate, this article would not have appeared.

*Al Venter in the process of firing a Russian-built RPG-7 – first taking aim and below, immediately afterwards*



**“LIGHTWEIGHT AND EASY TO ASSEMBLE, IT IS A REMARKABLY SIMPLY DEVICE TO FIRE. THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NO RECOIL AND THE WEAPON NEEDS ALMOST NO PRACTICE TO FIRE”**

*Left: A soldier holding the launching tube of an RPG-7*



*Right: A cluster of RPG-7 grenades, still the most-favoured weapon in the majority of Third World conflicts (Al Venter photo)*





The last was logistics. The key to EO's philosophy regarding conflict in Africa was that nothing happened unless it was actually made to happen. Having been involved with local ethnic people for most of their lives, the South Africans had a very good understanding of Africa. Also, they had been dealing with African leaders for a while by now and, without exception, government support was wanting.

Another SADF veteran who ran EO operations, former Recce Major Lafras Luitingh, put it: "All governments with whom we'd been associated made promises, in fact, lots of them. They always do, especially when the bottle is being passed around. But we've found – sometimes to our disadvantage – that these good intentions are rarely kept. Consequently, if we were to deploy a force in some remote region, we'd have to keep it supplied ourselves."

If anything were needed by the men in the field – from a toothbrush or a *sjambok* to a toilet roll – it had to arrive on the weekly privately owned Boeing flight that was allowed unimpeded access to major Angolan and Sierra Leone airports. Part of the deal was that EO was not subjected to immigration or customs controls. Significantly, *sjamboks* – hippo-hide quirts – seemed to form a useful adjunct to keeping strict discipline, something that would not be tolerated in any Western army today. In

**"THE 'FREELANCE' DETACHMENT WAS ONLY 40 STRONG AT BEST (AND, AS CASUALTIES MOUNTED, SOMETIMES HALF THAT) WHILE SAVIMBI'S UNITA FORCE FIELDIED MORE THAN A THOUSAND SEASONED VETERANS, MANY TRAINED BY THE SAME SOUTH AFRICANS THEY WERE NOW BATTLING"**

Africa not all that long ago, the strong-armed staff seemed to work very well.

Basically, in all theatres of military activity in which EO was active, the organization operated on the principle of the host nation providing the main component of military 'muscle' in order to get the job done. This included arms, ammunition and land support vehicles together with the fundamental military infrastructure that any army should be able to provide. Men in arms from the host nation were certainly part of the equation.

At the end of it, the company took with them everything else needed to keeps its force active in the field, together with the men who kept the cogs of war efficiently greased.

It is worth looking at the situation on the ground when EO took on their first assignment in Angola early 1993. Here they tackled a large

group of UNITA Special Forces at the Angolan oil terminal of Soyo at the mouth of the Congo River. They did not know it yet, but they were to be faced with formidable odds. The battle lasted from early March to the end of April and almost everybody who stayed the distance was wounded at least once.

The 'freelance' detachment was only 40 strong at best (and, as casualties mounted, sometimes half that) while Savimbi's UNITA force fieldied more than a thousand seasoned veterans, many trained by the same South Africans they were now battling.

What transpired was to become an epic chapter in close-quarter insurgency warfare, a conflict that quite often fringed on the conventional with the entire EO force isolated along a precarious stretch of jungle-surrounded terrain near Soyo. UNITA dominated the high

Soldier in West Africa with some of the weapons deployed in the war against AQIM (Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) linked to Boko Haram



Left: A mercenary with Executive Outcomes in Angola, moving out with Angolan Army T54/55 main battle tanks. The 'hired guns' never bothered either with proper uniforms or official ranks (Hennie Blaauw photo)



ground and while the Luanda Government promised support – including armour – only a single Soviet T54/55 tank eventually emerged, brought in by barge from Luanda.

There were actually two, but one got stuck in the sand on the beach while it was being brought ashore and it didn't help that most of the ammunition went into the water because most of the Angolans handling the process were drunk. A squadron of amphibious BMP-2 infantry fighting vehicles was also supposed to arrive by sea from Luanda, but in the end this never materialised.

Worse, the majority of the Angolan Army soldiers tasked to support the South African mercenary group had been press-ganged off the streets of Luanda: few had been properly trained. The result was that as soon as the shooting started, the majority high-tailed it into the jungle. They would only emerge the following day when food was being prepared

for the unit. The EO commander quickly put a stop to that: "Leave your post and don't come back because you won't get fed," and that seemed to do the trick. It was a classic battle and the EO had almost no air support for most of it, though a handful of non-combat Mi-17 helicopters would arrive most days with ammunition and supplies and to take out the wounded. At the end of it three EO men were killed, but they took with them an estimated 400 of their adversaries.

Executive Outcomes' Soyo adventure was eventually to become synonymous with what a well-discipline bunch of war dogs can achieve in a regional 'Third World' conflict. To other PMCs that might be active in remote, distant lands, it also offered what Kipling said of the Boer War: "no end of a lesson".

Another reality that can be gleaned from this encounter, however, is that unconventional conflicts sometimes demand drastic solutions.

With decades of bush war combat behind them, this South African group managed to open doors that had been shut ever since Africa was vacated by the Colonial Powers in the 1960s and 1970s. Some considered Soyo as arguably the toughest single campaign fought by any group of mercenaries in modern times.

The fact that there were a dozen or more tough battles fought in the 60 days that Soyo lasted – most within shooting distance of each others' front lines – coupled to an exceptionally low casualty rate among company personnel. What took place at this isolated jungle oil installation was both a tribute to their tenacity and a remarkable level of professionalism displayed under fire.

In that singular effort, EO vindicated any doubts that the company's adversaries might have had as to their efficacy outside the ambit of a conventional military force. Make no mistake, EO had critics aplenty, in Angola itself as well as in Britain, the United States and South Africa.

For a start, the Angolan High Command was extremely critical that their government had hired a group of elite fighters who they themselves had spent years trying to destroy. More to the point, they resented that the 'Boers' had succeeded, whereas they – the Angolan army and the air force – had failed.

**"UNITA DOMINATED THE HIGH GROUND AND WHILE THE LUANDA GOVERNMENT PROMISED SUPPORT – INCLUDING ARMOUR – ONLY A SINGLE SOVIET T54/55 TANK EVENTUALLY EMERGED, BROUGHT IN BY BARGE FROM LUANDA"**



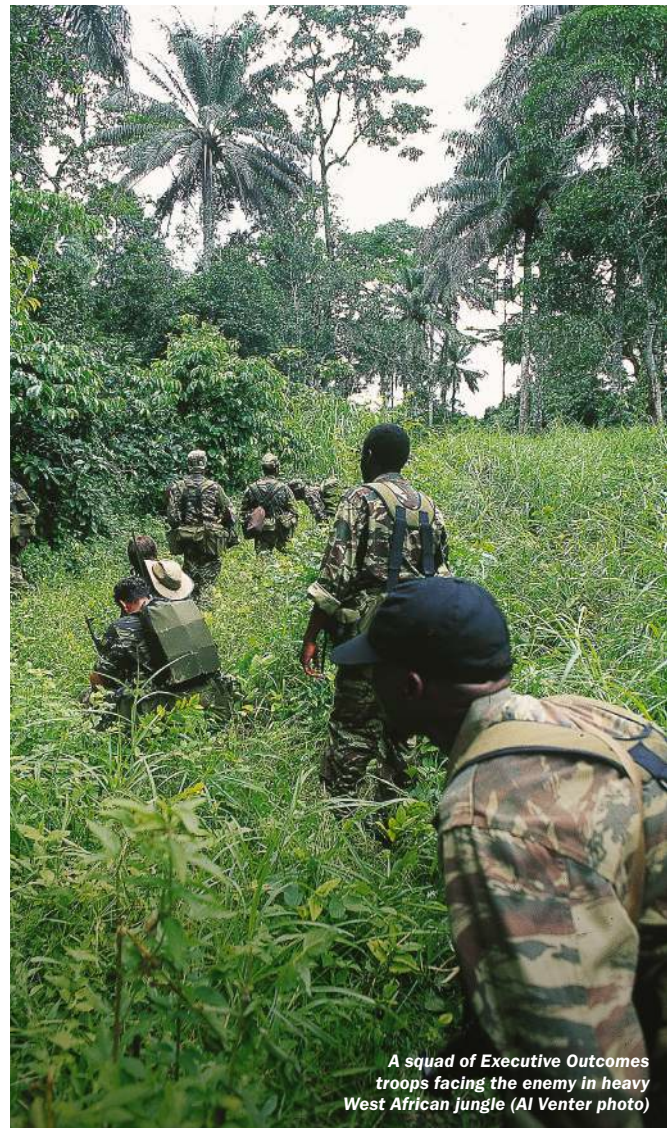
Ammunition captured from a squad of UNITA rebels ambushed by the South African mercs (Al Venter photo)



Jonas Savimbi, leader of UNITA (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola) pictured 1975



One of the Russian mercenary pilots flying Hinds when Executive Outcomes arrived: he was quickly displaced.



A squad of Executive Outcomes troops facing the enemy in heavy West African jungle (Al Venter photo)



That Savimbi's guerrilla army took Soyo again after the South Africans had pulled out was of no consequence. Everybody was aware that EO had done what it had been tasked and that was what really mattered. Ousting UNITA from Soyo a second time became a formality: this time round the attackers had good support from both armour and helicopter gunships.

It is notable that while all this activity was ongoing in Africa, race was never an issue. This is surprising since the mercenaries involved were from a South Africa just then emerging from the racial dictates of Apartheid. In fact, it did not take long for many more black faces to appear within EO ranks.

There was good reason. Though the first EO recruits involved at Soyo were all white, the majority of these professionals had in the past worked closely with their African compatriots while still fighting the 23-year Border War.

Combat units with the police unit Koevoet for instance, were three quarters African and even though the majority of those men had formerly been enemy combatants when captured, each was given the option of 'turning turtle' or face the consequence. They all knew exactly what that implied...

It came as no surprise that these black fighters displayed remarkable tenacity under fire – and most, having grown up in the bush were brilliant trackers. So, when their former South African commanders were recruited by EO, it didn't take long for the word to go out to

their trusted *compadres* to join them, which the majority did with alacrity. For a start, the money was excellent. That situation held years later when the Boko Haram imbroglio surfaced: more than half of the mercenaries fighting the Jihadis were African, almost all EO veterans.

The act of engaging in hostilities for cash and sometimes killing people has always been a controversial matter. Even more so after Saddam Hussein was ousted and the American military went into Afghanistan in 2001: a lot of freelance soldiering followed. By the time the war in Iraq was in full swing, it was estimated that there were more than 20,000 South Africans working east of Suez in what became known as Private Military Companies or PMCs.

Officially they and contractors from many countries offered security in an extremely hostile environment and obviously, there were moments when clashes resulted with people who abhorred their presence. They apparently did a good job because South Africans with solid military experience were always in demand. In fact, they still are: wherever you go in Iraq and Afghanistan these days, these people are still around.

Mauritz le Roux, a former South African Army engineer and one of the founders of Executive Outcomes went into the war in Iraq with a small PMC of 40 men early on. His Dubai-registered company SafeNet ended up fielding several thousand professional soldiers, with many black and white South Africans in the ranks.

These people proved to be outstanding operators under sometimes harsh conditions. In an ambush in Iraq's Falluja in April 2005, a dozen contractors attached to Le Roux's crowd – caught in a narrow street ambush – drove off about 60 attackers without one of their members hurt. It was a violent exchange of gunfire that went on for several minutes and the Iraqis who'd initiated the ambush took some serious knocks, including several of their number killed.

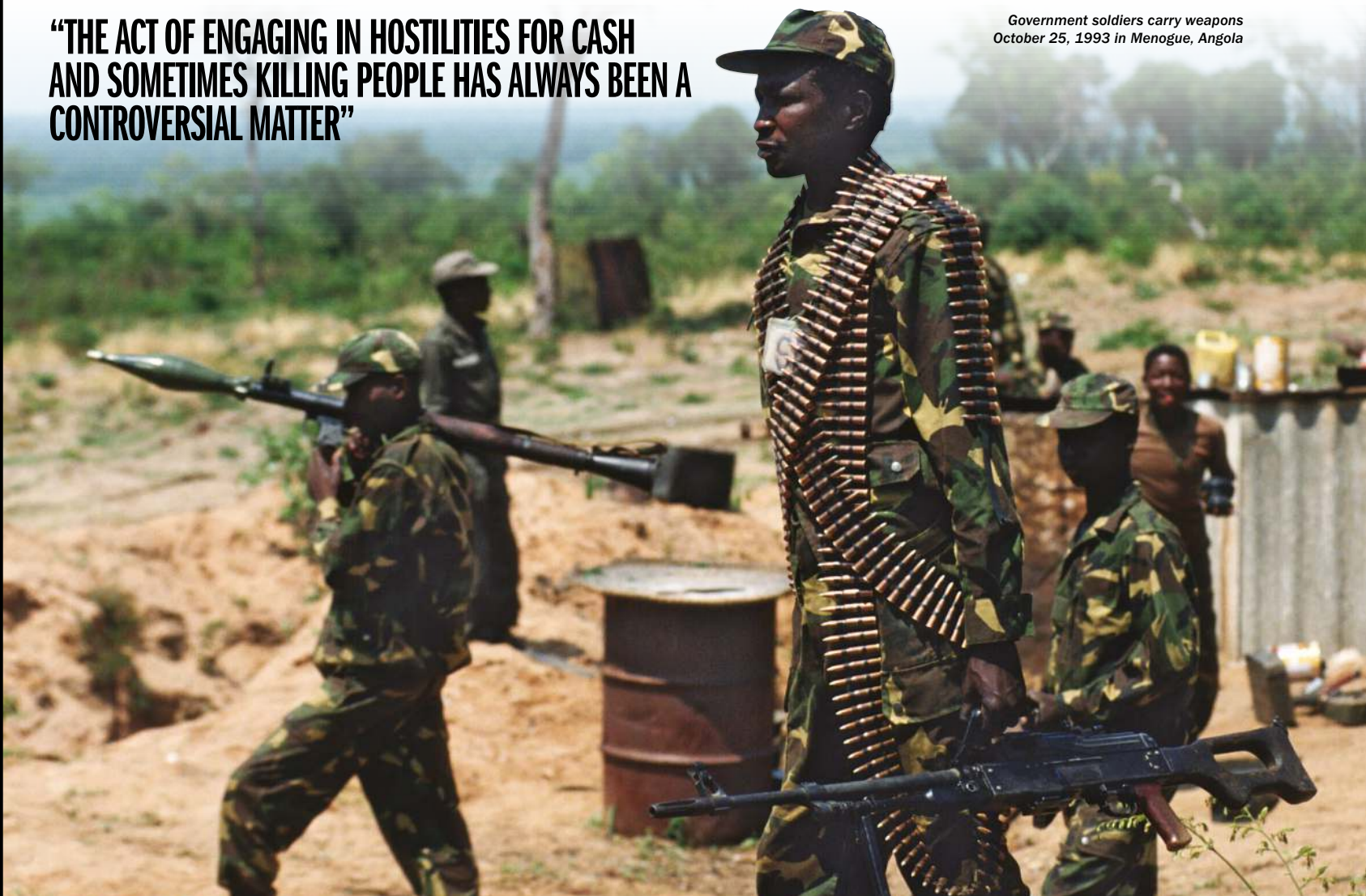
In contrast, Blackwater, an American PMC also in Iraq at the time, recorded more than 30 deaths among its own people by the time they were disbanded, and then under a cloud of controversy. The main difference was that while the Americans strutted about the streets of Baghdad and other cities almost defiantly and with their weapons in full view, le Roux's people, like their British associates, played it distinctly low-key.

As le Roux mentioned at the time: "None of my men wear uniforms... they go about in civilian vehicles, get the job done and return to base, no questions asked." He admitted that he actually preferred them to don Arab head dress when going into dodgy areas or when it was felt that discretion warranted it.

For all that, the question remains: why have mercenaries got such a bad name? Undoubtedly, some of the otherwise unemployable rabble that fought in a succession of wars involving mercenaries in

## "THE ACT OF ENGAGING IN HOSTILITIES FOR CASH AND SOMETIMES KILLING PEOPLE HAS ALWAYS BEEN A CONTROVERSIAL MATTER"

Government soldiers carry weapons  
October 25, 1993 in Menoçue, Angola







One of the South African mercenaries hired as air crew for the Mi-17 Hips by Executive Outcomes and operational against UNITA rebels in Angola (Al Venter)

## MI-17 HELICOPTER

THE FORMER SOVIET/RUSSIAN MI-17 HELICOPTER (NATO DESIGNATION HIP) IS A MILITARY VERSION OF THE MI-8 BUT WITH DIFFERENT MODEL ENGINES

The Mi-17 came with Klimov TV3-117MT engines whereas the Mi-8 (civil version) had the Klimov TV3-117MTV. In the Cold War epoch there were also sensors for chemical and nuclear warfare.

Nowadays, the MT seems to have fallen out of favour and the helicopters are currently fitted with the MTV engine, which is far better suited for 'hot and high' operation.

The earlier version of the Hip was also designated the Mi-8, but had the lesser powered Klimov TV2-117 engines, whereas the TV3 series engines allowed for a substantial increase in power and was originally developed for the Russian military during the latter stages of their war in Afghanistan.

On armaments carried by these helicopters, fired from the cargo space behind the cockpit, the mercenary air wing in Angola were using

the 7.62mm PKT machine gun, essentially a PKM but designed for helicopter use and with an electrical firing system.

Mercenary chopper pilot Neall Ellis who flew for the Sierra Leone government for the duration of its civil war and played a major role in destroying the rebel effort, used Soviet PKMs mounted in an antiquated Mi-17 dubbed 'Bokkie'. When he needed more firepower he would equip with a DsKh 12.7mm mounted to port and for firing out the chopper's side door. The original mounting was made by Executive Outcomes flight engineers prior to his arrival.

While flying 'Bokkie' operationally after the EO days, former British SAS operator Fred Marafono tended to prefer the British GPMG as his weapon of choice in almost actions in which he was involved.



'Bokkie' the ageing Mi-17 helicopter given to mercenary aviator Neall Ellis 'in lieu of wages' (Al Venter)

Executive Outcomes deployed its own Mi-17 helicopters in some of the West African operations in which the company was involved (Al Venter)





the Congo in the 1960s had a lot to do with it. That was before former British Army Major Mike Hoare and the legendary French mercenary Bob Denard had been able to knock some order and discipline into their respective units.

There are still photos floating about on the internet of these white troops proudly displaying the heads of decapitated black insurgents on stakes, something that should never have been allowed to happen.

As for freelance combatants earning money while fighting foreign wars, this is a two-edged sword. For a start, all soldiers – whether in their national armies or employed by companies combating insurgencies in places like Iraq, Nigeria, Colombia, Afghanistan or Sierra Leone – are paid. Nobody fights for free. Secondly, the majority of these mercenaries have been able to give a very good account of their fighting ability and, in the process, saved a lot of lives.

The journalist and former spy Frederick Forsyth encapsulated it well when he declared almost tongue-in-cheek in an op-ed for the *Wall Street Journal* on the 15<sup>th</sup> May 2000: "For the mercenary is a simplistic fellow. Not for him the strutting parades of West Point, the medals on the steps of the White House or perhaps a place at Arlington. He simply says: 'Pay me my wage and I'll kill the bastards for you.' And if he dies, they will bury him quickly and quietly in the red soil of Africa and we will never know."

He was referring, of course, to the then ongoing guerrilla struggles in post-independent

Angola and a horrifically brutal rebel uprising in Sierra Leone.

That was followed on 12 February 2002 by a British White Paper titled 'Private military Companies: Options for Regulation' which stated that 'although the number of South African mercenaries involved in Angola were small – Executive Outcomes never had more than 500 men in Angola and were usually fewer, compared with Angolan armed forces of more than 100,000 men – [they are] generally regarded as having played a critical part in securing victory for the government forces...'

In truth, mercenaries have been around a lot longer than most people imagine. Military historian Sir John Keegan was of the view that people forget that one of the supreme British heroes, General Gordon, served in the Middle East as a mercenary. Moreover, he did so several times with government approval, once under the Chinese Emperor and later, under orders of the Khedive of Egypt.

So too with Colonel Pulaski, hero of the American artillery corps, who fought under a foreign flag and got paid for it, as did the illustrious Marquis de Lafayette who served with distinction in the American Revolutionary War, offering strategy as well as a sword.

The Persian Emperor Darius used regiments of Greek mercenaries against Alexander the Great, while German mercenaries fought for the highest bidder just about forever. You might recall that in the same Revolution Britain's

George III hired squads of Germans to subdue his rebellious American colonists and they were apparently very good at it.

Into the modern period, Gurkhas could feasibly be classified as mercenaries. So too, British officers and men who served in the Sultan of Oman's Armed Forces – some of whom are still at it.

The same could be said of the relatively small group of South African mercenaries who went into Angola in March 1993 and brought that country back from the brink. Speak to them today and they will tell you, almost to man, that they are enormously proud of what they did. They will recall the lives they saved and the unthinkable brutalities they were instrumental in preventing.

When this mercenary group went into Angola, Jonas Savimbi's UNITA controlled about 90 per cent of the country's rural areas. That all changed after a South African strike force had driven his guerrillas out of the Cafunfo diamond diggings a year later, which we deal with in the next issue.

Without the \$200 million that Cafunfo and Catoca's alluvial diamond diggings yielded each year, the rebels were unable to keep the war alive because there was no money for weapons. Dr Jonas Savimbi was soon afterwards forced to the negotiating table. In the process Executive Outcomes had achieved more in less than two years than the Angolan Army had not managed in two decades.



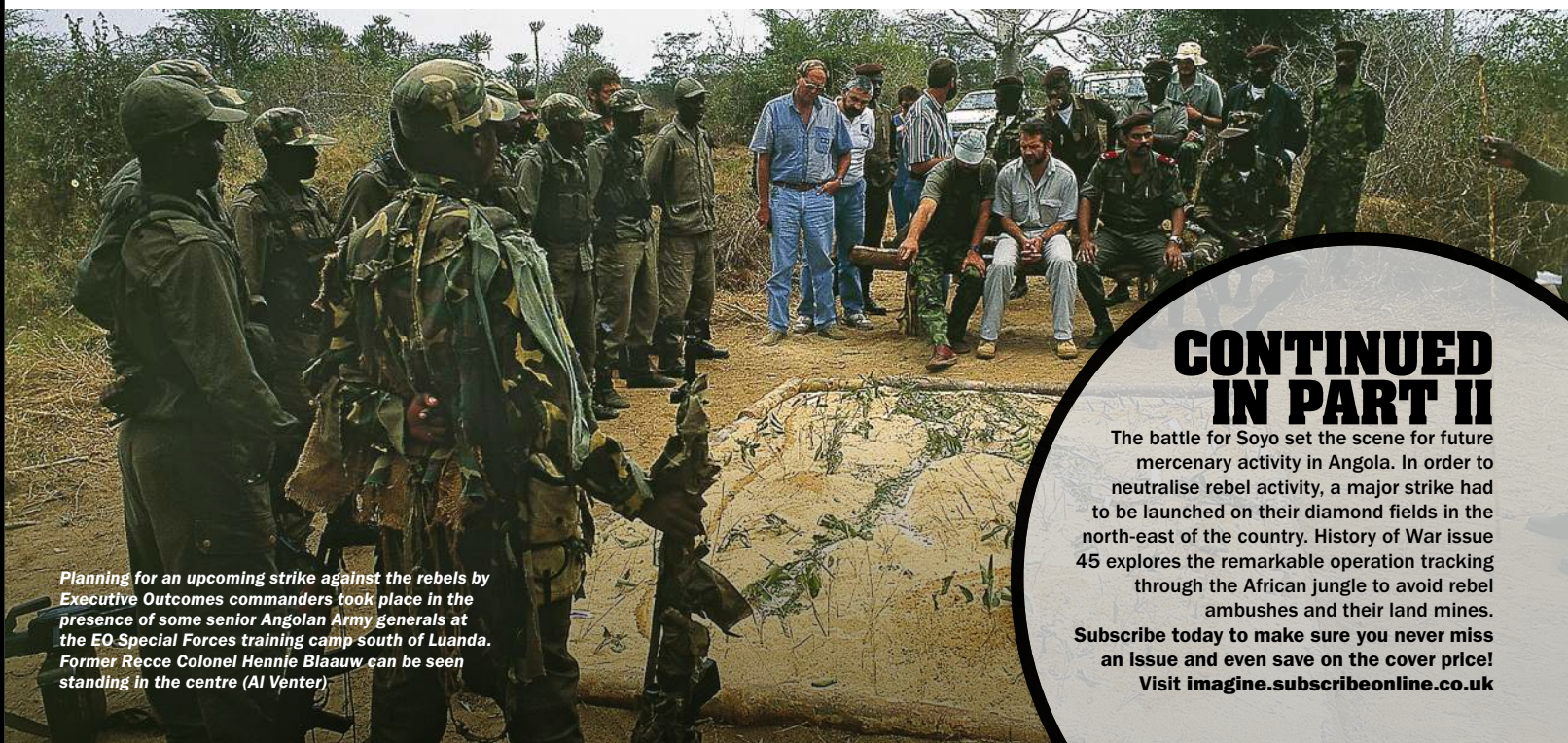
**Above:** Diamond diggings in Angola, which Executive Outcomes eventually 'liberated' from UNITA



**Above:** EO's Jonny Maas during an instruction phase with Angolan Army Special Forces' trainees (Al Venter)



**Above:** Some of the heavier guns captured from the Angolan Army by South African Forces during the Border War



**Planning for an upcoming strike against the rebels by Executive Outcomes commanders took place in the presence of some senior Angolan Army generals at the EO Special Forces training camp south of Luanda. Former Recce Colonel Hennie Blaauw can be seen standing in the centre (Al Venter)**

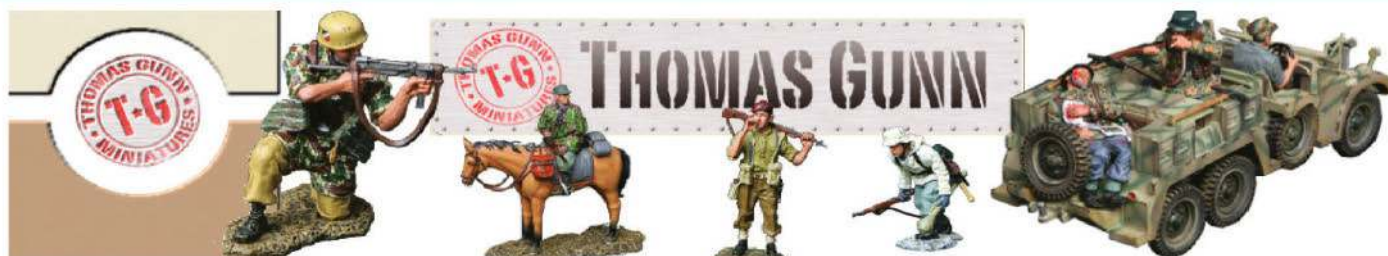
## CONTINUED IN PART II

The battle for Soyo set the scene for future mercenary activity in Angola. In order to neutralise rebel activity, a major strike had to be launched on their diamond fields in the north-east of the country. History of War issue 45 explores the remarkable operation tracking through the African jungle to avoid rebel ambushes and their land mines.

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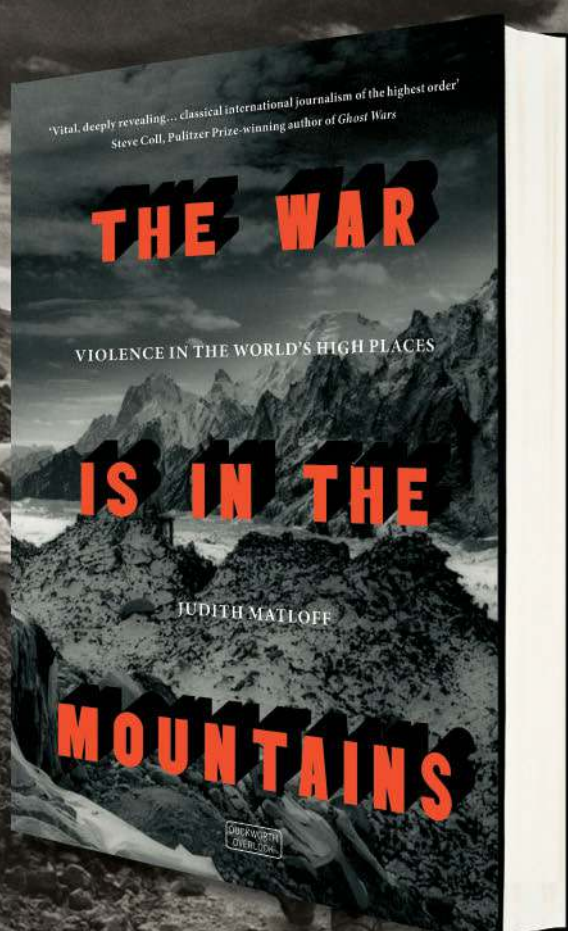
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# SKANDERBEG

## AN UNTAMED LION

In the decades that saw the fall of Constantinople to the Turks and their advance to the gates of Central Europe, one man resisted the mightiest army in the world from his “eagle’s nest” in Kruja for nearly 25 years

WORDS ALEKSANDAR PAVLOVIC

Originally called George Kastrioti, the Ottomans called him Iskander Bey

**B**orn in 1405, the fourth son of a local Albanian chieftain, Skanderbeg could have hoped at best to get his name recorded in history as one among many Balkan notables of the time. Instead, a combination of perilous circumstance and his military genius has turned him into a pan-European icon, military exemplar and national symbol of resistance. Many late renaissance and post-renaissance European artists celebrated his deeds, and British poets readily recognised his fame, calling him “the scourge of Turks, and plague of infidels” (Sir Edmund Spenser). General James Wolfe, the 18th century hero of Quebec, described him as a commander who “excels all the officers, ancient and modern, in the conduct of a small defensive army”.

Even recent British biographers are full of respect and admiration. “His assets were meagre: a fortress that lay like an eagle’s nest on the sheer side of a mountain, never more than 20,000 armed men, and a touch of genius in waging guerrilla cavalry operations.” (Harry Hodgkinson).

### The defection

Skanderbeg was born in Debar in present-day Macedonia, but his life became inextricably bounded with the

fortress of Kruja. Facing the nearby Adriatic sea, Kruja stands as the “nest of some great bird of the cliffs” tucked in a bare limestone mountain whose top is nowadays appropriately called ‘the Balkan Balcony’.

Skanderbeg’s father, Gjon Kastrioti, became the lord of Kruja around 1400 and stretched his influence locally through a combination of personal initiative and dynastic arrangements. Skanderbeg himself came to prominence after leaving the Turkish forces during the Battle of Niš in 1444. Longfellow’s poem captures Skanderbeg’s dramatic escapade from the battle as it went down in popular imagination: “In the darkness of the night/Iskander, the pride and the boast/Of that mighty Othman host,/With his routed Turks takes flight.”

In actuality, Skanderbeg took part in the battle with his own units, as did other regular Ottoman vassals, and left it anticipating its end. He rushed back to gain control over the fortress of Kruja, taking it over without a fight, and proclaimed his independence. But the Turkish defeat at Niš was merely a drawback. It is said that one sultan described defeats as shaving, after which the hair grows again quickly. The very next year, the Christian army suffered the loss at the Battle of Varna, which ended the crusade. It was clear that the Turks would now turn to punish Skanderbeg for his defection.

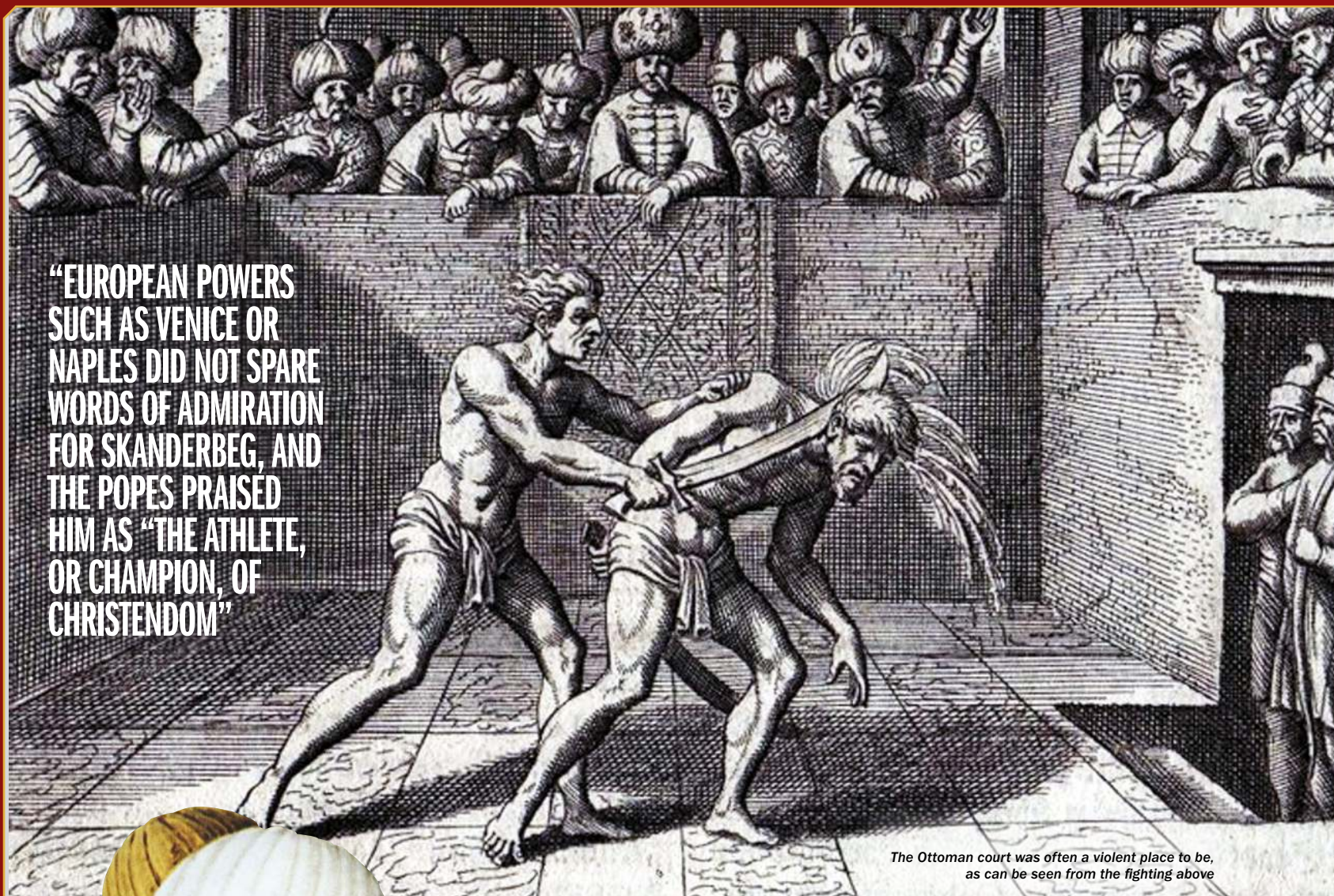




**“HIS ASSETS WERE MEAGRE: A FORTRESS THAT LAY LIKE AN EAGLE’S NEST ON THE SHEER SIDE OF A MOUNTAIN, NEVER MORE THAN 20,000 ARMED MEN, AND A TOUCH OF GENIUS IN WAGING GUERRILLA CAVALRY OPERATIONS”**







**“EUROPEAN POWERS SUCH AS VENICE OR NAPLES DID NOT SPARE WORDS OF ADMIRATION FOR SKANDERBEG, AND THE POPES PRAISED HIM AS “THE ATHLETE, OR CHAMPION, OF CHRISTENDOM”**

*The Ottoman court was often a violent place to be, as can be seen from the fighting above*

### The scourge of the Turks

Meanwhile, seeing that there was no punitive army in sight, Skanderbeg captured the castle of Petrela near Elbasan and several others, then stopped at the eastern frontier with the Turks. His territory was now cleared from the Muslims and, after many years, ruled by the Albanians. In March 1444 in Lezhë, he formed a coalition of local chieftains that could put to a battlefield a sizeable but by no means impressive army of some from 12,000-18,000 men. With that sizeable force he prepared to meet the imminent Turkish campaign.

In the summer of 1444, an army led by general Ali Pasha was sent to effectively deal with Skanderbeg, and he moved to meet them in the plains of Torviollo, on the Ottoman controlled territory. As the story goes, the approaching Turkish general saw in front a rather meagre semi-circular formation of horsemen with Skanderbeg in the middle, who looked as if they hoped to negotiate rather than to fight. But Ali Pasha was not into talking under such

favourable conditions; uttering the words: “Ever do the greater devour the lesser”, he ordered a full frontal attack at dawn. Yet, just as he was about to reach Skanderbeg’s measly forces, hidden Albanian cavalry emerged from the woods, closing him from the flank and the rear. A bloodbath followed, and by the afternoon Skanderbeg’s army had killed 8,000 and captured 2,000 Turks. These numbers given by Skanderbeg’s biographers are certainly grossly exaggerated and should be divided by ten if not by 100. Nonetheless, the battle was a decisive victory and introduced a new, modest yet daring player in the region.


The very next year, Sultan Murad II dispatched another army of 15,000-strong under the command of Firuz Pasha from Skopje. In order to avoid the mistakes of the previous campaign, Firuz Pasha moved his army from Skopje to Prizren with the aim of rapidly passing through the valley of the Black Drin and surprising his enemy directly in Kruja. But Skanderbeg saw that coming and swiftly gathered a few thousand men, which was more than enough to ambush his opponent’s forces in some of the numerous narrow passes perfect for such a purpose in Prizren’s vicinity.

It is believed that the sultan now contemplated leading the army against Skanderbeg himself but gave that up, fearing the Hungarians may move against him once he engaged the bulk of his troops in the Albanian highlands. So, in 1446,

*Left: Sultan Murad II oversaw a period of Ottoman expansion*







Murad II is shown here alongside his troops during the Ottoman invasion of Persia

# THE MYTH OF SKANDERBEG'S SERVICE AT THE SULTAN'S COURT

EVIDENCE SUGGESTS THAT, CONTRARY TO POPULAR BELIEF, SKANDERBEG DIDN'T GROW UP IN A PRIVATE OTTOMAN WORLD

The tale of Skanderbeg's alleged Islamisation and childhood at the Ottoman court exemplifies how far a well-told story with good marketing can reach. The narrative, as told by his contemporary biographer Marin(us) Barleti(us) and adopted by classical historians from Gibbons to Toynbee, certainly has dramatic merits. It talks about a boy, Georg Castrioti, taken to the then capital Adrianople as "blood levy" by the Turks alongside his older brothers; three of them are then poisoned, while the youngest is circumcised and Islamized. He becomes the favourite of the sultan, who gives him the nickname Iskender Bay, or Skanderbeg – as "an indelible memorial of his glory and his servitude" (Gibbon) – meaning Lord Alexander and reminiscing Alexander the Great. Skanderbeg, we are told, is raised on the

sultan's luxurious court and enjoys all the privileges, only to abandon him later at the battlefield in the name of his persistent Christian allegiance.

In actuality, however, the Turks suffered a major drawback after the 1402 Battle of Angora (or Ankara), in which Timur defeated and killed Sultan Bayezid I, and were on the decline for much of Skanderbeg's childhood years. The devshirme, "blood levy" or collection of Christian boys in the Balkans for the Turkish army, was reinstated only after Murad II came to power in 1421, and it took some years for it to reach Albania. Other arguments aside, in a charter from 1426 we read that Skanderbeg's father Gjon and his four sons gave two villages as a gift to Serbian royal monastery of Chilandar at Mount Athos. This is the conclusive proof that the family was together when Georg

was in his early twenties, and thus they probably became subjected to the Ottomans probably as late as 1430s.

Yet, while Skanderbeg was not in the sultan's service as a boy, the tension between him and Murad II might have been real. The name the Turks gave Skanderbeg and the fact that he, the youngest of the brothers, had comparatively large possessions, are indicators of his service to the sultan, for his lands surpass his inheritance. Light-headed as this servitude might have been, it was thus the sultan who raised the youngster to prominence, and one could easily see the sense of personal grudge in that the great Murad II, the conqueror of Thessaloniki, personally leads expeditions against a comparatively minor local chieftain such as Skanderbeg.

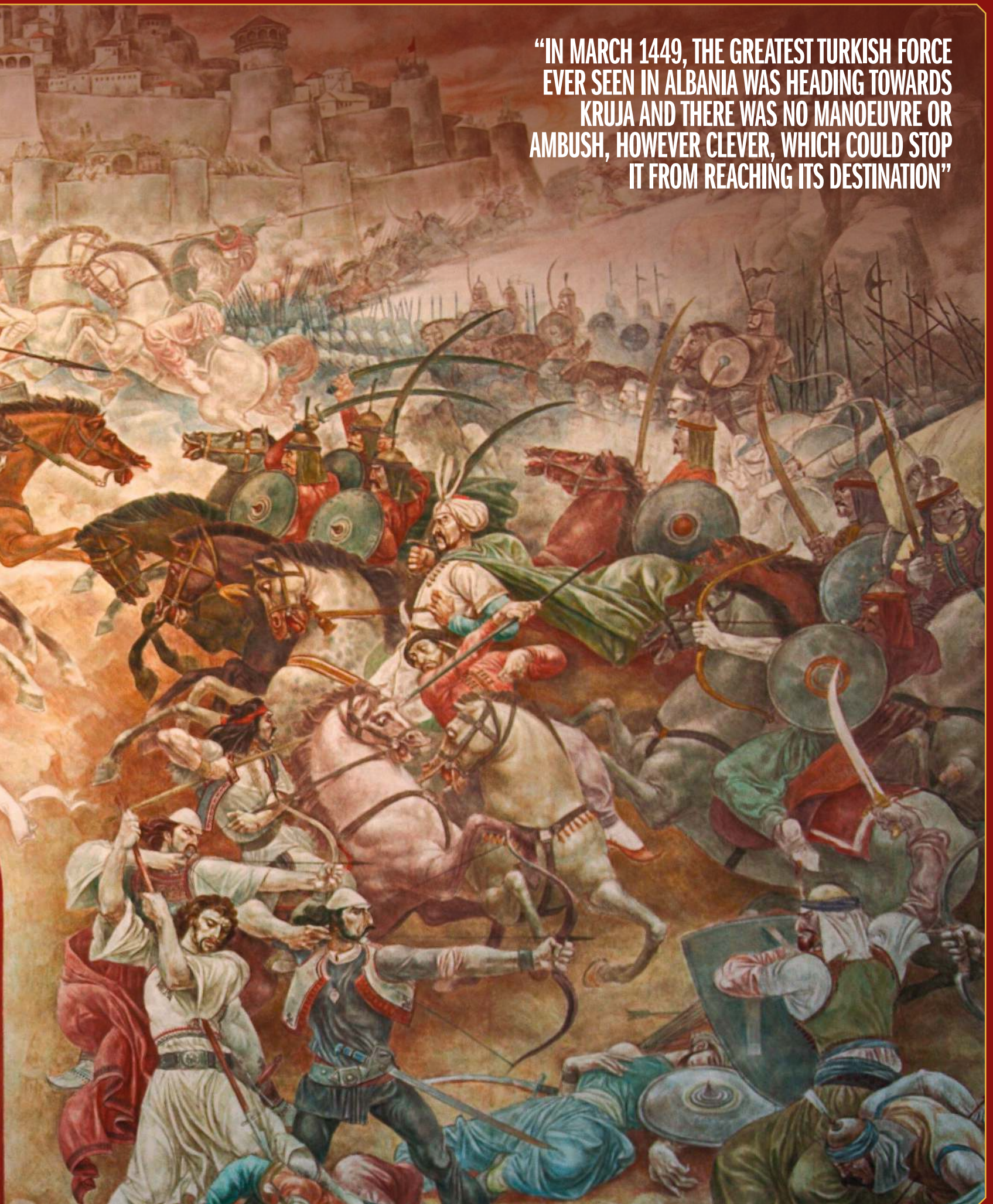




This stunning mural is one of many found inside the Skanderbeg Museum that depict his victories



**"IN MARCH 1449, THE GREATEST TURKISH FORCE EVER SEEN IN ALBANIA WAS HEADING TOWARDS KRUJA AND THERE WAS NO MANOEUVRE OR AMBUSH, HOWEVER CLEVER, WHICH COULD STOP IT FROM REACHING ITS DESTINATION"**





# THE LEAGUE OF ALBANIAN PRINCES

HOW A FELLOWSHIP OF PRINCES HELPED TO LAY THE FOUNDATIONS FOR THE STATE OF ALBANIA

The League of Albanian Princes is a rather excessive name Albanian historiography uses for the coalition of Albanian chieftains established in St Nicholas Cathedral in Lezhë on March 2, 1444. The instigator of the league was Skanderbeg himself, who in the preceding months denied allegiance to the sultan and now sought to unite the local forces that would meet the imminent invasion.

As Skanderbeg's father Gjon cleverly married all five daughters to neighbouring dignitaries, the crux of the coalition comprised his five brother-in-laws: Musachi, Balša, Arianiti, Thopia and the Crnojevis from Montenegro. The other four were Dukagjini, Zaharia, Spani and Dushmani. One could ponder if this union was wholehearted, as it actually lessened the influence of some families at the expense of the Castriots. In any case, most of them were rather chieftains

than princes, and their recognition of Skanderbeg as a leader effectively meant that he was simply *primus inter pares*, first in line on the battlefield and perhaps reputation, but otherwise by no means their master in a proper sense.

At best, the coalition could put up to 18,000 armed men on the battlefield, out of which only 3,500 were directly under Skanderbeg's control. That was the entire force that would, along with impenetrable Albanian mountains and Skanderbeg's military brilliance in waging guerilla and defensive warfare, repeatedly meet – and beat – the largest army of the time and kept it at bay for nearly a quarter of a century.

While the coalitions' name seems somewhat hyperbolized, it is easier to comply with historians who interpret this event effectively as the political birth of the Albanian nation. Later sources even provide us with the speech that Skanderbeg allegedly

gave to the people of Kruja. "O, my Albanians...

It is not I who has given you this Nation and superiority. It was not I who put arms in your hands. I found you ready in arms. I found you everywhere bearing the signs of liberty in your heats, in your faces, in your swords, and in your lances." To be sure, Skanderbeg's actual words would have been quite different from such patriotic speech that becomes possible only with the birth of modern nations in the late 18th and early 19th century.

Yet it is the fact that this coalition brought unity among the awakened Albanians, who were previously ruled – and usually divided – by Serbs, Byzantines and most recently the Turks. Hence, the League, while *de jure* being only a provisional coalition of local warlords and chieftains, in practice marked an event that will resonate and one of the touchstones of later Albanian national identity and pride to this day.

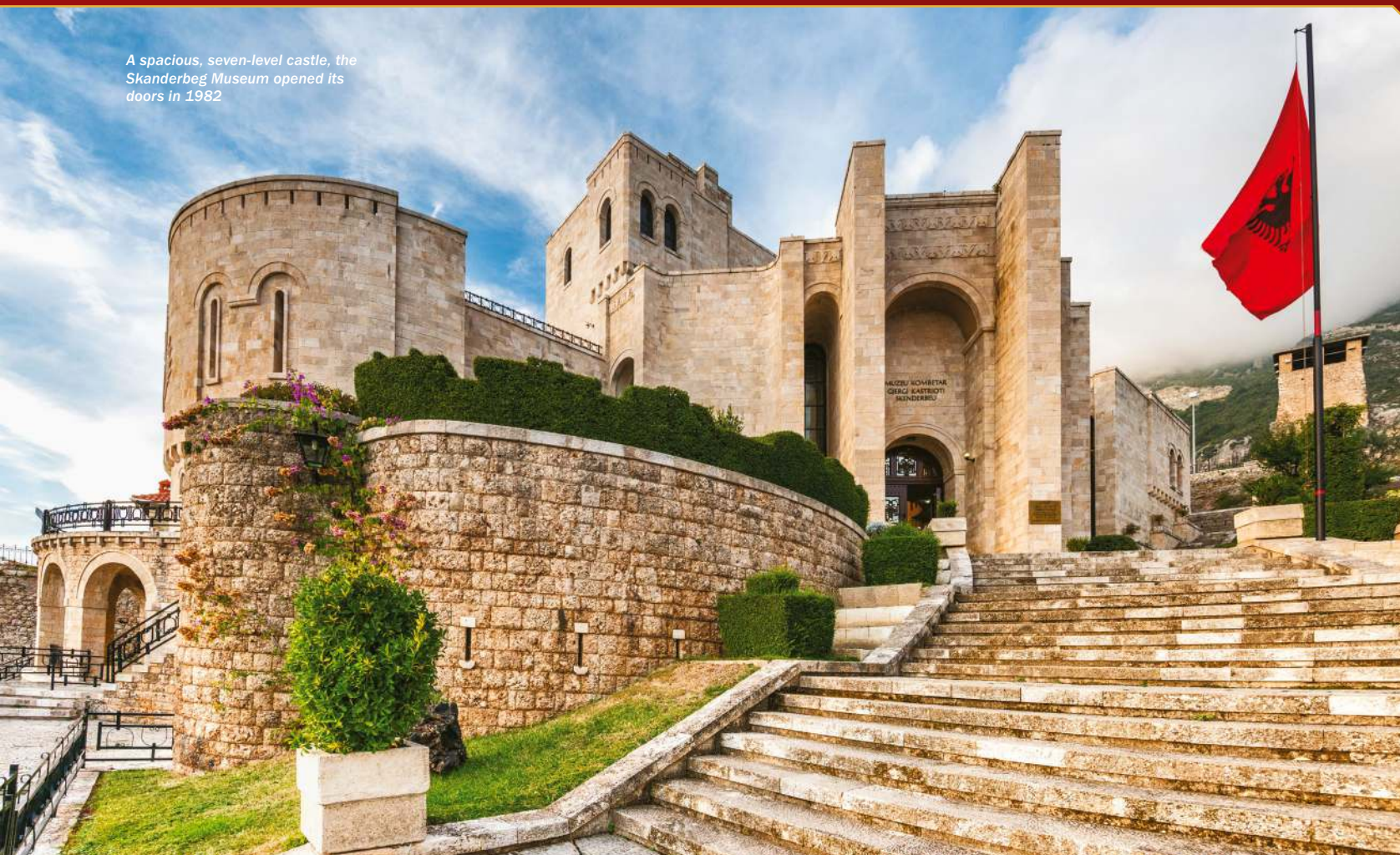
*Skanderbeg and members of the League of Lezha*



**"AT BEST, THE COALITION COULD PUT UP TO 18,000 ARMED MEN ON THE BATTLEFIELD, OUT OF WHICH ONLY 3,500 WERE DIRECTLY UNDER SKANDERBEG'S CONTROL"**



A spacious, seven-level castle, the Skanderbeg Museum opened its doors in 1982



he sent another general, Mustafa Pasha, to what was becoming an annual invasion of Albania. The new general had instructions to avoid both pitched battles and ambushes and to finally bring the burden of fighting to Skanderbeg's territory. In order to do so, the army now moved slowly but safely, burning down the crops along the way to disable local guerrilla's actions.

Skanderbeg moved to the hills with both army and civilians. By all accounts, this looked as if he admitted defeat and moved home to prepare for the defence. However, by luring his enemies into confidence, Skanderbeg intended to exploit their lack of caution, and his swift cavalry made a surprise attack on the night of 27 September, killing many of those who did not manage to escape the chaos.

Given that these victories came soon after the collapse of the 1444 crusade, European powers such as Venice or Naples did not spare words of admiration for Skanderbeg, and the popes praised him as "the athlete, or champion, of Christendom" (Eugene IV) and "that most redoubtable athlete and fearless warrior of the true faith" (Nicholas V). But, apart from nice words and some financial and logistical support, they offered insufficient help to enable sustainable and long-term existence for Skanderbeg and his mountaineers. What is more, the defeat of the Christian coalition in the 1448 Second Battle of Kosovo meant that the entire weight of the Turkish army could now be brought onto Skanderbeg. As for the sultan, if the previous expedition was not clear enough, the third humiliation showed that he would need to deal with this opponent personally.

**"AFTER A FORTNIGHT OF ARTILLERY ACTIVITIES, A LARGE BREACH WAS FINALLY MADE AND THE GENERAL ASSAULT ORDERED. BUT IN THE MIDST OF THE ATTACK, SKANDERBEG MANAGED TO PENETRATE WITH HIS CAVALRY AND KILL MANY IN THE TURKISH ENCAMPMENT"**

#### Against the sultan himself

In March 1449, the greatest Turkish force ever seen in Albania was heading towards Kruja and there was no manoeuvre or ambush, however clever, which could stop it from reaching its destination. Even if figures in the region of 150,000 are exaggerated, this was an enormous force by any account, containing cavalry equipped with lance and plate of main and great swinging maces, and infantry with swords and shields, among which were the sultan's loyal, reorganised janissaries.

People rushed to churches to pray or lament their fate. Skanderbeg reinforced Kruja and, leaving it in the hands of Count Vrana, went with his men to enflame his subjects elsewhere and aid Sventigrad Fortress, which lay in the very front of his territory and prevented easy access to it. If Kruja was his capital, Sventigrad were its gates. The Sventigrad defenders fought vigorously. In order to aid them, Skanderbeg made fierce surprise attacks with his cavalry, but this was a mere disturbance. Sventigrad held for months until finally succumbing to the Turks under unclear circumstances. The sultan now secured a safe passage from his inland territory towards Kruja, which was

a major achievement. Still, it was the end of campaigning season and he returned to Adrianople without reaching Kruja.

Next, Murad II went directly to destroy the "inexpugnable walls" of Kruja with perhaps as many as 160,000 men and technical novelties such as "small artillery on the backs of the lunging camels and the supplies of brass and other metals from which the great guns were to be cast on the spot" and impressive 200-pounder and 600-pounder cannon balls. Skanderbeg again left Vrana in the fortress with rations enough for a year and moved to the hills with his cavalry to disturb the enemy as much as possible.

After a fortnight of artillery activities, a large breach was finally made and the general assault ordered. But in the midst of the attack, Skanderbeg managed to penetrate with his cavalry and kill many in the Turkish encampment, almost losing his own life. According to one narrator, his shield was "so battered that its shape was scarce to be discerned". Two more attacks were called in the following weeks, but with no success.

Upon realising that the besiegers were not immune to Skanderbeg's surprise attacks,



Murad II cautiously posted guards and deployed large forces, even sending some artillery towards the presumed direction of Skanderbeg's actions. But Skanderbeg did not wear wild goat antlers on his helmet for nothing; he somehow always managed to penetrate, divert the guard or lure his enemies into a trap and cause damage. He was ambushing the ambushers and besieging the besiegers, thus constantly confusing the enemy and damaging their morale. Still, the defenders were hurting as well, and they had far less men to spare than the sultan. But with six months passing by and Kruja still standing, Murad II eventually assembled what he had left of the army and on October departed to Adrianople with his tail between his legs. In Kruja, celebrations were soon followed with efforts to repair the city walls. But there would be no reason for haste as Murad II died of apoplexy in January of 1460, without ever adding Kruja and Skanderbeg's head to the list of his otherwise very impressive achievements.

Admittedly, there were two principal reasons for his failure. First, unlike his Christian

contemporaries elsewhere, Skanderbeg deployed his light cavalry with immense speed in small numbers in and near hills, avoiding frontal conflicts and open fields, and thus managed to constantly hound his enemy. Second, Kruja did not lie on the crown of the hill but, "like an eagle's nest, it was almost part of the mountain against which it had been built". It was said that a dozen or so hits to the same spot with the biggest guns were needed to create a hole. But they could be used only a few times a day and were imprecise and unreliable, equally hazardous to their users as to their targets. In other words, the attackers were fighting not just men, but "the works of nature", and their technical superiority was still inadequate for it.

### The aftermath

The new sultan, Mehmet II, was alongside his father under the walls of Svetigrad and Kruja on his father's campaigns, and thus certainly no less eager to punish Skanderbeg for earlier humiliations. But he had other priorities, like conquering Constantinople in 1453 and capturing the rich lands of Serbia and Bosnia and reaching Hungarian and Habsburg territories. This gave the Albanians a much-needed short break, even though eventually weakening further their position.

To be sure, the Turks did not simply leave them be. Their raids continued, coupled with tempting offers and bribery for the renegades, and large forces were occasionally sent against Skanderbeg. These were now led by Albanians who converted to Islam and were loyal to the sultan,

like Balaban Pasha or even Skanderbeg's relatives like Hamza Kastrioti.

They could not be deceived and ambushed easily as they knew the terrain well; Balaban was even once a shepherd on Skanderbeg's land – a clear sign to what prominence the sultan could raise those loyal to him. Kruja still resisted and Skanderbeg continued to proudly roam the mountains. But the lowlands were increasingly controlled by the Turks and their garrisons were all around; it was clear the Turks were here to stay, though Skanderbeg was still winning the battles.

Mehmed II himself returned once more to Albania in 1466 and, just like his father before him, after three months of besieging Kruja returned to the capital. However, he left Balaban under its walls to continue the siege and sent reinforcements the following spring. But Skanderbeg managed to prevent them from joining forces and defeated the approaching army first, then continued to fight Balaban, who was eventually killed himself.

Oddly enough, Skanderbeg did not end his life on the battlefield, but died of malaria, a typical lowland illness. He caught it in early 1468 in Lezhë while trying to put together another coalition that would be a match for the inevitable next Turkish invasion. Keeping his legend alive, Kruja bravely resisted for another decade, but in 1477 it was finally starved to submission. The same year the Turks conquered Lezhë and its cathedral. They opened Skanderbeg's grave and took parts of his bones in the hope of capturing his bravery and success. Whether due to these amulets or other reasons, they ruled Albania for over four centuries. But when its spirit of liberation was resurrected, it was awoken under the sign of Skanderbeg and his double-headed eagle, engraved today into heraldry and symbolism of the Albanian state.

**"THEY OPENED SKANDERBEG'S GRAVE AND TOOK PARTS OF HIS BONES IN THE HOPE OF CAPTURING HIS BRAVERY AND SUCCESS"**

*Below: This 16th century engraving depicts Skanderbeg's death on 17 January, 1468*



Images: Alamy, Getty



*At 11 metres high, the Skanderbeg Monument dominates Skanderbeg Square in Tirana, Albania*



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Great Battles

# MARATHON

The first great clash of East and West: Greece against the might of Persia

WORDS MURRAY DAHM



## OPPOSING FORCES



VS



### PERSIANS

**LEADERS:** Datis and Artaphernes (aided by ousted Athenian tyrant Hippias)

**INFANTRY:** 24,000

**CAVALRY:** 1,000

**ARCHERS:** The majority of the Persian forces were archers

### GREEKS

**LEADERS:** Ten generals (including Miltiades, Stesilaus and Callimachus)

**INFANTRY:**

10,000 Athenians,

1,000 Plataeans

**CAVALRY:** 0

**ARCHERS:** 0



## THE BATTLE OF MARATHON, ATTICA, GREECE 10 SEPTEMBER 490 BCE

**A**s soon as the first Persian arrow struck the ground in front of them, the Greek army was ordered to advance at a run. 11,000 heavily armed hoplites surged forward across the empty plain, 200 yards towards the Persian front lines. If they could survive the onslaught of arrows during their charge, they would be the first Greeks to meet the Persians in open battle – the first not to show fear in the face of the Persian Empire. But first they had to run into a steady rain of deadly enemy shafts.

The Battle of Marathon is vital – integral, even – to the history of the world and Western culture for a whole raft of reasons. It is the first time Greek hoplites faced the troops of the mighty Persian Empire, and the repulsion of the Persian invasion of Greek soil changed the course of history. No one expected the small force from Athens and Plataea to defeat the might of Persia who outnumbered them at least 2:1, perhaps more. If Athens had lost that day, the young democracy would have been destroyed and, in its place, Athens would have become a vassal state of the Persian Empire. History as we know it would have been very

different. The fact that Athens gained victory gave her, and Greece at large, a self-confidence she would never relinquish, the results of which still surround us today in art, politics, philosophy, architecture, culture and language.

Marathon holds even more importance for the military historian. It is the first battle explored by reliable written history. Herodotus, 'the father of history', wrote his account in the 440s, and it represents the first history written by an actual historian rather than by a poet or a ruler (or their propaganda machine). Not that there aren't issues and complications surrounding Herodotus' work, but it marks a fundamental shift in how history was recorded. And one of the pillars of his account is the battle of Marathon (which comes in Book 6, chapters 102-117).

Herodotus' version of the battle presents us with several challenges (just as it has with historians of every age), although the general outlines of the battle are clear. Herodotus remains the oldest and most trustworthy source of the battle. What is more, even with these challenges and complications, we are still talking about the Battle of Marathon today, and trying to understand exactly what happened more than two and a half thousand years ago. The fact that it still matters to people is another testament to the importance of that September day on the Greek coast in 490 BCE.

### Ancient Preliminaries

In July 490, a force of 600 triremes departed from the Persian province of Cilicia (on the Anatolian coast of modern day Turkey) with the

**"IF ATHENS HAD LOST THAT DAY, THE YOUNG DEMOCRACY WOULD HAVE BEEN DESTROYED AND, IN ITS PLACE, ATHENS WOULD HAVE BECOME A VASSAL STATE OF THE PERSIAN EMPIRE. HISTORY AS WE KNOW IT WOULD HAVE BEEN VERY DIFFERENT"**





intention of punishing two Greek cities, Eretria and Athens. Both cities had assisted the cities of Ionia in a revolt against the Persian Empire five years earlier. The culmination of that revolt, before it was suppressed in 494, was to sack and burn the ancient capital of Sardis.

According to Herodotus (6.94), the Persian King, Darius I, was told daily, "Remember Athens," to keep his anger at the sacrilege of the burning of Sardis' temples fresh. The expedition was intended to punish the Greek cities and enslave their populations. Darius sent two trusted commanders, Datis, a Mede, and his nephew Artaphernes, to lead what was expected to be a straightforward, punitive expedition. They were instructed to "reduce Athens and Eretria to slavery." Accompanying the expedition was Hippias, a tyrant of Athens who had been ousted and expelled 20 years earlier. He had taken up residence at the Persian court, and intended to control his city once again with Persian help.

This expedition made its way via various Greek islands, with the intent of ravaging or subjugating them. They captured Naxos and other islands and sailed on to Eretria. The Eretrians defended their city walls for six days before the city was betrayed. The Persians stripped their temples and burned them in revenge. Next, they moved on to the Athenian deme (district or parish) of Marathon, chosen as their landing place because it was the centre

## "THE PERSIAN KING, DARIUS I, WAS TOLD DAILY 'REMEMBER ATHENS,' TO KEEP HIS ANGER AT THE SACRILEGE OF THE BURNING OF SARDIS' TEMPLES FRESH"

of support for Hippias' family, the Peisistratids. It had been Hippias' father Peisistratus who had established a successful tyranny in Athens from 546 to 527 BCE.

### The landing

Herodotus gives us no number for the Persian force that landed at Marathon, or indeed for the Athenians and Plataeans who opposed them. This marks the first time we are aware that Herodotus' priorities in recording the battle, and ours in learning about it, are at odds. Several ancient writers subsequently provide wildly exaggerated Persian numbers – intended to make the achievements of the Athenians Plataeans who opposed them all the more remarkable. The numbers of 10,000 Athenians and 1,000 Plataeans come from Cornelius Nepos (Miltiades 5.1), who makes the victory at odds of 10:1. This exaggeration is unnecessary, since the victory and accomplishment was still unprecedented.

Modern estimates assume 30 to 40 men per Persian trireme, which provides a number of between 18,000 and 24,000 men. Justin (2.9) talks of a Persian horde numbering 600,000 men, while a Simonides epigram gives their number as 90,000. There are many numbers in between. We also know from Herodotus' account that there were cavalry on the expedition (they were involved against Eretria, and he tells us (6.102) that the plain at Marathon was the best place for cavalry to operate on). Herodotus also mentions horse transports in addition to the 600 triremes, and yet in his account of the battle itself, cavalry are absent. This is inexplicable, and has led to all sorts of dissatisfaction with Herodotus and speculation from historians, beginning in the ancient world and continuing today.

Cavalry was an important part of Persian warfare, and so some say that cavalry was present at the battle, but was not mentioned, while others say that the cavalry was away foraging. At the same time, the Stoa Poikile or 'Painted Porch', built in the Athenian Agora later in the 5th century (around 460) featured a painting of the battle by the artist Panaenus. We have a description of the painting by the geographical writer Pausanias (1.15.3), which does not mention cavalry. At the same time, however, a Roman copy of the Stoa did include a Persian cavalryman, but he was not of high rank or important to the battle's outcome.

Elsewhere, Pausanias (1.32.4) talks of the field of Marathon as being haunted: "Every night you can hear

horses neighing and men fighting." Pausanias also mentions that the painting had portraits of Callimachus and Miltiades, the two most prominent Athenians in Herodotus' version. One possibility is that Herodotus does mention cavalry – he names the Sacae in the Persian battle line (6.113) – and the Sacae were a Scythian people, who were renowned for providing the Persians with cavalry. They were armed with bows and battle axes. Despite our modern concerns, however, Herodotus provides reliable general outlines for events of the battle. With only a little work, we can know what happened that day. What else Herodotus tells us is intriguing for all sorts of reasons.

As soon as they learned of the landing at Athens, all adult males hurried to meet it, marching 26 miles to the site. We might imagine that every available man was mustered to serve – Pausanias mentions Athenian slaves fighting beside their masters at the battle (1.32.3). The Athenians had already known the Persians were coming. A contingent of 4,000 Athenian settlers from Chalcis had gone to the aid of Eretria, but had been sent away to avoid being captured. These men may have returned to Athens. It was also probable that the Athenians had seen the smoke rising from Eretria, and that this was a forewarning of the fate that awaited them should the Persians succeed.

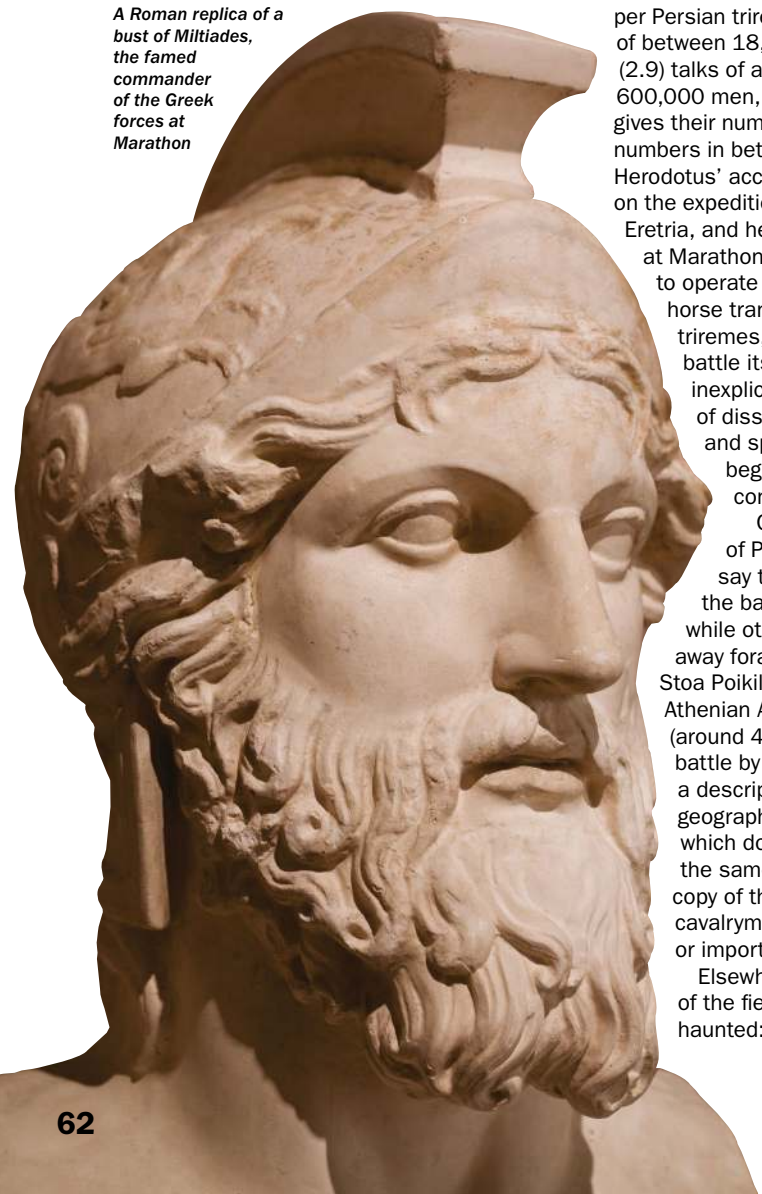
Athens may also have learned from Eretria that defending the walls of the city would prove futile (and allow for betrayal of their city by pro-Persians within), and so determined to march out and meet the foe in open battle. The Athenians had therefore gathered their full strength and sent out to their allies for assistance. Only the small Boeotian city of Plataea had answered the call, sending 1,000 of its hoplites. They also sent the professional runner Pheidippides to Sparta, who covered the 140 miles in two days. Sparta was acknowledged as having the best fighters in Greece, and any defence should have had them involved. The Spartans, however, were holding a religious festival, the Carneia, and would not come to the aid of Athens until the full moon.

### The commanders

As we have heard, the commanders on the Persian side were Datis and Artaphernes assisted by the local knowledge of Hippias. On the Athenian side things are slightly more complicated. The Athenians were commanded by a board of ten generals (strategoi), with each probably in charge of 1,000 men drawn from each of the ten tribes of Athens.

An earlier institution was the appointment by lot of an overall general or polemarch. In Herodotus' account we have both institutions – a board of ten generals (which included Miltiades) and an overall commander (Callimachus). There may be some crossover, as some historians date the board of ten generals to after the battle, others accuse Herodotus of anachronism in including the older institution of the polemarch. It is possible that the two institutions were mixed for a time. It is also possible that Callimachus was regarded as the most senior general. Certainly, the role and prominence of both men in the battle is never questioned.

A Roman replica of a bust of Miltiades, the famed commander of the Greek forces at Marathon

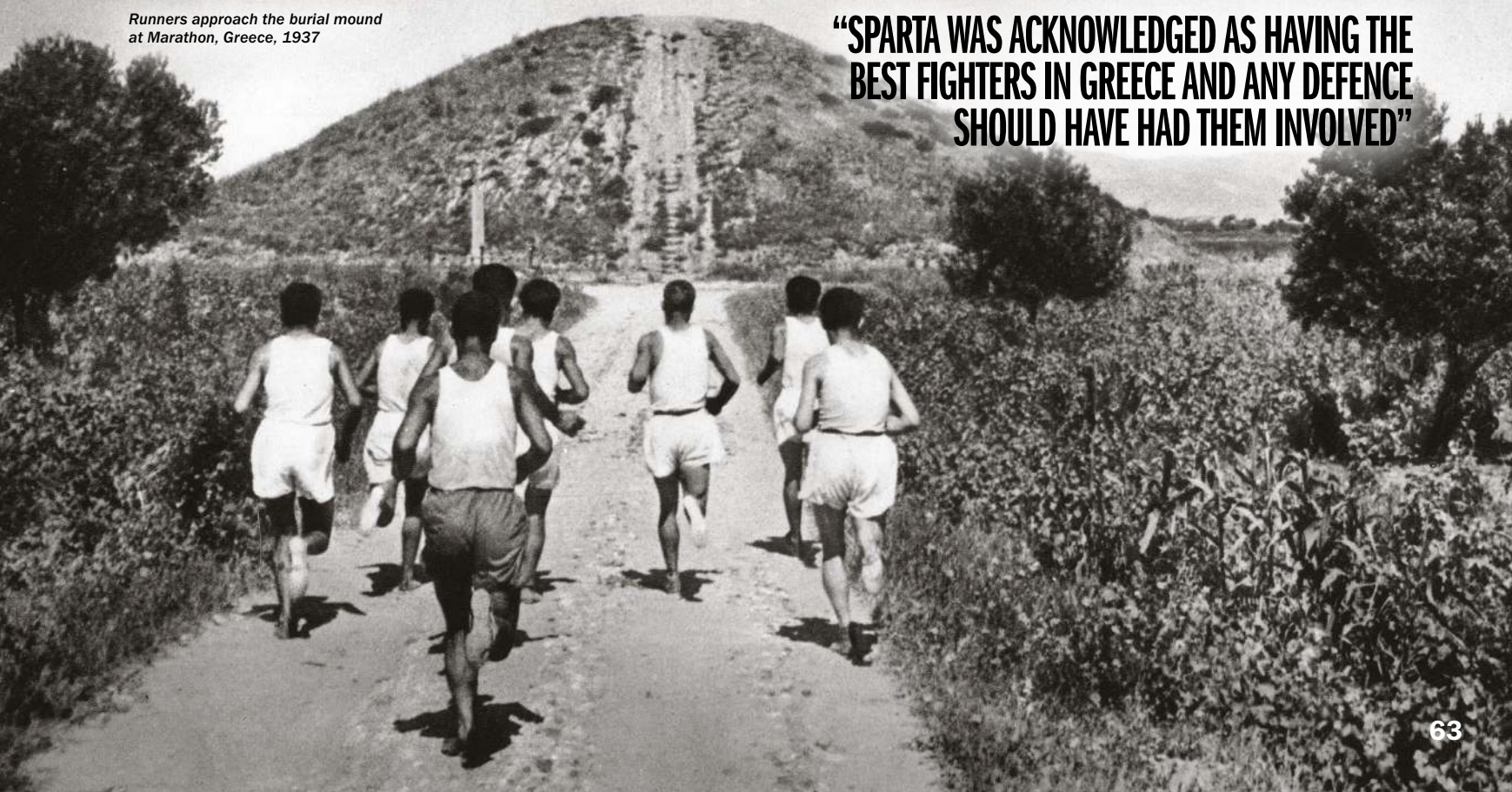






*Pheidippides delivers news of the victory over the Persians to the people of Athens*

*Runners approach the burial mound at Marathon, Greece, 1937*



**"SPARTA WAS ACKNOWLEDGED AS HAVING THE BEST FIGHTERS IN GREECE AND ANY DEFENCE SHOULD HAVE HAD THEM INVOLVED"**



# BATTLE OF MARATHON

## 490 BCE

### 04 PACKED WINGS AND WEAKENED CENTRE

The Greek line of 11,000 men consisted of a right wing (where Miltiades and Callimachus were stationed) of 2,000 men packed eight ranks deep, a left wing (1,000 Plataeans and 1,000 Athenians) and a centre of 7,000 Athenians, four ranks deep.

### 05 AT THE RUN

The Greek line advanced towards the Persians 'at the run.' They closed all across the line, and there was fierce fighting. The Persian divisions were probably also divided into 24 units of 1,000 men, ten ranks deep. The Sacae and Persians held the centre.

### 06 THE LINES MEET THE CENTRE BREAKS

While the wings held, the Sacae and Persians broke through the centre of the Greek lines. This is where the burial mound of the Athenian dead, the Soros, was later raised. The Persians pursued the defeated Greeks towards Mt Kotroni.

### 03 BATTLE LINES ARE DRAWN

After a delay, the Greeks offer battle. The Persians and Greeks draw up their battle lines; the Persians with their backs to the sea, the Greeks a mile inland on the first slopes of Mt Kotroni.

### 02 THE ATHENIANS MARCH

The Athenians march to Marathon and encamp at the opposite end of the bay, in the precinct of Heracles. They are joined there by 1,000 men from Plataea, arriving from the Vrana road.

### 07 VICTORIOUS WINGS

After the fighting, the Greek wings were victorious, and the Persian lines fled towards their ships on the Schoenia. The Greek wings joined together and concentrated on defeating the victorious Persians and Sacae in the centre.

ATHENIAN  
CAMP



**08 THE CHASE TO THE SHIPS**

When the Persians and Sacae were defeated, the Greeks chased them and the remnants of the rest of the Persian army to the fleet. The Greeks took control of seven Persian triremes, but also suffered losses in doing so.

PERSIAN  
CAMP

**01 THE PERSIANS LAND**

The Persian force of 600 ships lands, beaching their fleet on the north-eastern end of Marathon Bay, the Schoenicia. The swampy ground provides some protection for the fleet. The Persians make their camp in-land of the swamp.

ΚΟΛΠΟΣ  
ΠΕΤΑΛΙΟΝ



0 1 km

● PERSIAN ARMY

● GREEK ARMY

Another possible issue is the amount of credit given to Miltiades, regarded as the architect of the battle. Herodotus does not name all the other nine generals (only one other Athenian general is known, Stesilaus, who also died in the battle). Callimachus was the senior commander, but he was to die at his moment of glory, taking hold of the Persian ships.

When Herodotus was researching his account and talking to the veterans of Athens, it was Miltiades' son, Cimon, who was the most prominent and influential politician of the day. This may have influenced the amount of credit given to Cimon's father – Plutarch doesn't even mention Callimachus. Nonetheless, Miltiades was associated with the victory early in its history, and no one stepped forward to contradict his prominent involvement. He was also a man who had seen Persian tactics before in the Chersonese, and he may have been the only Athenian commander with such experience. That his knowledge would therefore be relied on would be natural. Herodotus emphasises Athenian unity in opposing the Persians, so the minutiae of who was in charge was not a primary concern.

**The two sides wait**

Once the Athenians marched out to the plain of Marathon, they encamped in the precinct sacred to Heracles, where they were joined by the men of Plataea, then waited. This delay has caused several issues for modern reconstructions, and provided the grounds for much speculation. Were the Athenians waiting for the Spartans to arrive? If that was the case then why was battle joined before the Spartans arrived? In the event, 2,000 Spartans did arrive after the battle, surveyed the site, turned around, and went home.

Modern reconstructions speculate that the reason battle was joined early was that the Persians may have been moving troops on to the ships to sail and take the city of Athens. This speculation has the added advantage (to modern ears) that the cavalry may have been re-embarking, and so it explains two problems in one go – why there were no cavalry and why there was a battle without the Spartans. But again, there is very little in the sources to warrant such speculation. There was ancient speculation – Cornelius Nepos says that it was the Persians who attacked (Miltiades 5.5), but this absolutely contradicts all other accounts.

Plutarch includes the time it took to build an abatis to protect the Greek flanks from cavalry attacks. Speculation like this also helps these later writers explain why cavalry were not involved. Another possibility for the wait was that there may have been elements within Athens who welcomed the Persians, and who would take their share of power if they co-operated with their Persian masters. One family, the Alcmaeonids, were accused of just that following the battle. Prior, such men may have been arguing to prevent battle.

Herodotus explains the wait as having divided opinion among the Athenian commanders. Here, Herodotus' picture of the command structure works perfectly – the ten generals were divided equally 5:5 on whether to fight or not. Callimachus, as polemarch, broke the deadlock. Herodotus gives Miltiades a speech





The Greeks pursue the Persians to their boats, forcing them into the sea

to persuade Callimachus around to his point of view. Even after the decision was taken to fight, there was still more delay. Herodotus explains this by saying that Miltiades waited for his day of command (the ten generals held the senior command by daily rotation). When that day came, we (the modern historians) finally get some satisfying detail.

### Architecture of war

When Miltiades' day of command finally came about (6.111):

*The Athenian army moved into position for the coming struggle. The right wing was commanded by Callimachus – for it was the regular practice at that time in Athens that the polemarch should lead the right wing; then followed the tribes, in their regular order; and, finally, on the left wing, were the Plataeans.*

This is finally a satisfying chunk of text containing concrete detail for modern historians to grasp on to. We do not know what the regular order of the tribes was, so any more detailed arrangement of the Athenians is speculative. Military historians since the 19th century have been obsessed with exact troop dispositions, and in the case of this first battle in written history, we simply have to make do. We may also suggest, however, that Miltiades' tribe (of 1,000) was also that on the right – Callimachus as polemarch would not have had a tribe to command, himself and the rotation of the command would mean Miltiades' troops held the position of honour. Herodotus' next two chapters (6.112-113) give us the battle itself:

*One result of the disposition of Athenian troops before the battle was the weakening*

*of their centre by the effort to extend the line sufficiently to cover the whole Persian front; the two wings were strong, but the line in the centre was only a few ranks deep.*

This, too, satisfies the military historian – to a point. We tend to think that the wings were eight ranks deep and the centre four ranks deep. Exactly which units were involved in the wings and the centre is unknown. If 1,000 men were eight ranks deep then that gives a frontage of 125 men; if four ranks deep then a frontage of 250 men. Therefore, if each wing comprised 2,000 men, each wing would be 250 men wide. The weakened centre consisting of 7,000 men, at four ranks deep, would have a front of 1,750.

Arguments about how much space an individual hoplite took up vary; the consensus view is three feet (90 centimetres, a pace, or a yard). This would mean that, based on the above calculations, the Athenian front would be 6,750 feet (2,025 metres). This would match the Persian frontage. We know from later sources that the Persian army also had units of 1,000 men and they may have drawn up ten ranks. If that was the case at Marathon then, if they had 24,000 men, they would have had a frontage of approximately 7,200 feet or 2,160 metres.

The crux of the battle comes in Herodotus' next sentence: "The Athenians advanced at a run towards the enemy, not less than a mile

away." No one believes that the Athenians could have run that far in formation, in armour, and fought a battle at the end of it. Modern reconstructions instead say that the actual run was only for the final 200 yards (180 metres); the range of Persian bow shots. Herodotus' emphasis is on the valour and courage of this charge, not its prowess as a feat of athletics.

The legend was more important than the details:

*They were the first Greeks, so far as we know, to charge at a run, and the first who dared to look without flinching at Persian dress and the men who wore it; for until that day came, no Greek could hear even the word Persian without terror.*

The Persians could not believe that the Greeks would advance in such a way without the support of cavalry or archers. They thought that the Greek charge was suicidal; surely they would all be mown down by their arrows. The Persians had not counted on the superior protection afforded by the hoplites' armour, shield and helmet. The Greeks made their run and closed with the enemy all along the line, and, in Herodotus' phrase 'Fought in a way not to be forgotten.' You can almost hear the cheers from Herodotus' (Athenian) audience as he read his work out to them. He tells us that in the centre the Persians and Sacae broke through the Greek line and pursued the defeated hoplites "inland from the sea."

**"THEY WERE THE FIRST GREEKS, SO FAR AS WE KNOW, TO CHARGE AT A RUN, AND THE FIRST WHO DARED TO LOOK WITHOUT FLINCHING AT PERSIAN DRESS AND THE MEN WHO WORE IT"**





## FURTHER READING

- ★ HERODOTUS THE HISTORIES, ANY TRANSLATION
- ★ PETER KRENTZ THE BATTLE OF MARATHON (YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS: YALE, 2010)
- ★ RICHARD A. BILLOWS MARATHON. HOW ONE BATTLE CHANGED WESTERN CIVILIZATION (DUCKWORTH: LONDON AND NEW YORK, 2010)
- ★ ALAN LLOYD MARATHON. THE CRUCIAL BATTLE THAT CREATED WESTERN DEMOCRACY (SOUVENIR PRESS: LONDON, 1973)

This phrase gives us pause for thought on the position of the battle lines.

Most maps show the battle as running across the plain, at 90 degrees to the shore. If that is the case, then this phrase must be metaphorical, 'inland' meaning simply 'invasion'. If the battle lines ran parallel to the shore, however, the pursuit inland makes more sense. The placement of the burial mound for the Athenian dead, the Soros, also makes more sense if the lines were parallel to the sea. The Soros is still there today and its position is most likely to have been where most of the Athenian casualties occurred, that is in the centre where the line broke. On the wings, however, the Greeks were victorious, so much so that they drove the Persians from the field, and managed to join up and destroy those Persians who had broken through the Greek line in the centre. They chased the defeated Persians to their ships, where there was another fight (and where several prominent Athenians died, including Callimachus). They then took seven ships from the Persians.

### Aftermath

As soon as the majority of the Persians had re-embarked in their ships, the fear was that they would make their way towards an undefended Athens and seize the city. The Alcmaeonid family were accused of signalling this to the Persian fleet. This is a glimpse of the politics that could interfere with any military operation, and even in the glory of victory, contemporary politics would very soon find a way to intrude. The Athenian army had to march immediately back to Athens, a race against the Persian

## "EVEN IN THE GLORY OF VICTORY, CONTEMPORARY POLITICS WOULD VERY SOON FIND A WAY TO INTRUDE"

fleet. The fleet had to traverse 70 miles by sea, the Athenians 26 miles by land, but they were exhausted by having fought a battle.

Nonetheless, they won the race, and arrived as the Persian fleet came into view. This was the first 'marathon' (although another story is of Pheidippides' running back to Athens to tell them of the victory: "nikomen" "we win!" and then falling dead). Finally defeated, the Persians turned around and sailed home. They would return ten years later with an army of 5 million men (according to Herodotus).

The Persian casualties amounted to 6,400 dead. The Athenians lost only 192 men. Their names were recorded in marble on the Soros raised in their honour. We can therefore be relatively sure of the number of Athenian dead (Herodotus would not have contradicted a monument which was well known and could be checked), although some historians have speculated that Herodotus' number of Persian dead represents 100 dead per three Athenians.

### Anecdotes of battle

Many of our sources for ancient battles are dissatisfying for modern readers, because they do not describe or analyse the battle in question in the way we would like (or in the

way we would hope to in the same position). Instead, they give a summary of events (sometimes highly confusing), and then move on to other things. Marathon is no different. After a sketchy account that has caused centuries of debate, he moves on to anecdotes of what happened to individuals before the battle and within it. We hear of the god Pan being on the Athenian side (6.105), of Hippias sneezing out a tooth (6.107) and this foretold he would lose, and in the battle itself, we hear of Cynegirus having his hand cut off as he seized a Persian ship (6.114), and Epizelus who went blind when a he faced a huge bearded warrior (6.117).

These anecdotes appear elsewhere too – Pausanias tells (1.32.5) of the legend of Echetaeus, who supposedly fought at the battle with a plough, and Pheidippides' marathon is recorded by Lucian (six centuries later). We need to remember that Herodotus was reciting his work for a (mostly) Athenian audience and so they wanted to hear entertaining and exciting stories, not statistics and dispositions. Unlike us, they all knew how battle was fought, so the details of battle which to us are nuggets of gold, to them would have seemed pedantic and boring. What happened to old Epizelus, however, was entertaining to that audience, although to us such stories get in the way of the details of battle.

The Athenians had faced the Persians without fear, they had run at them and won a resounding victory. The confidence that this victory gave to Athens and all Greeks, and the hurt to Persian pride, would shape western history for centuries to come.





## Heroes of the Victoria Cross

# WILLIAM HALL

Hall holds the distinction of being the first black man, the first Nova Scotian, and third Canadian to win the VC for doggedly clinging to his gun in 1857

WORDS FRANK JASTRZEMSKI

**W**illiam Hall's mother and father, both born into servitude, fled from the United States in the early 19th century, crossing into Canada and forging a new beginning in Nova Scotia. Hall escaped a life of bondage and arrived into the world on 25 April 1829. Having been raised on the maritime coast, Hall worked as a merchant for a short stint before crossing into the United States and arriving at Boston, enlisting in the United States Navy in 1847. Under the alias of William Harvey, the black Nova Scotian served aboard both the USS *Franklin* and the USS *Savannah*, concluding his American naval service with the USS *Ohio* in June 1849.

Hall journeyed to London to enlist in the Royal Navy in 1852, entering service aboard the HMS *Rodney*. One year later, war broke out between the Ottoman Empire and Russia, leading to an Anglo-French expeditionary force being dispatched to the Crimea.

Hall was one of the sailors to come ashore and act as artillerymen or foot soldier in the Royal Naval Brigade under the overall command of the battle-hardened Captain Stephen Lushington. Hall fought at the Battle of Inkerman, also serving in the trenches during the siege of Sevastopol. For his role in these operations, Hall earned the Turkish Medal and the Crimean Medal (Inkerman and Sebastopol clasps were added to the medal for his role in these engagements).

Shortly after the war ended in 1856, Hall transferred to the 2,667-ton, 51-gun steam frigate, the HMS *Shannon*, commanded by the daring Captain Sir William Peel, who had earned immortality in the navy (and a VC) for

his gutsy performance during the Crimean War. The HMS *Shannon* left England for China on March 17, 1857, dispatched to protect British economic interests amid the civil war being fought between the Manchu rulers and the Taiping rebels. While in transit, dreadful news arrived reporting the spread of mutiny among the sepoys in India. Lord Elgin, in command of the expedition on its way to China, dispatched three warships from Singapore – the HMS *Sanspareil*, HMS *Shannon* and the HMS *Pearl* – to Calcutta to lend support.

The HMS *Shannon* steamed up the mouth of the Ganges River and reached Calcutta on 29 August. Hall joined hundreds of sailors pulled from the HMS *Shannon* to act as ground troops and artillerymen in a hastily assembled naval brigade placed under the command of its captain. The sailors unloaded and hauled with them six 68-pounders, two eight-inch howitzers, eight 24-pounders, two small guns and eight rockets. Sporting white jackets with matching trousers, accompanied by a black handkerchief tied around the neck and straw

**“HALL, WITH UTTER DISREGARD FOR LIFE, KEPT LOADING AND FIRING THE GUN UNTIL THE WALL HAD BEEN BREACHED AND THE RELIEF OF LUCKNOW HAD BEEN ASSURED”**

hats, their uniforms set them apart from the other British land units, largely clothed in scarlet and khaki. The sailors' expertise in operating these naval guns would be instrumental in the coming weeks.

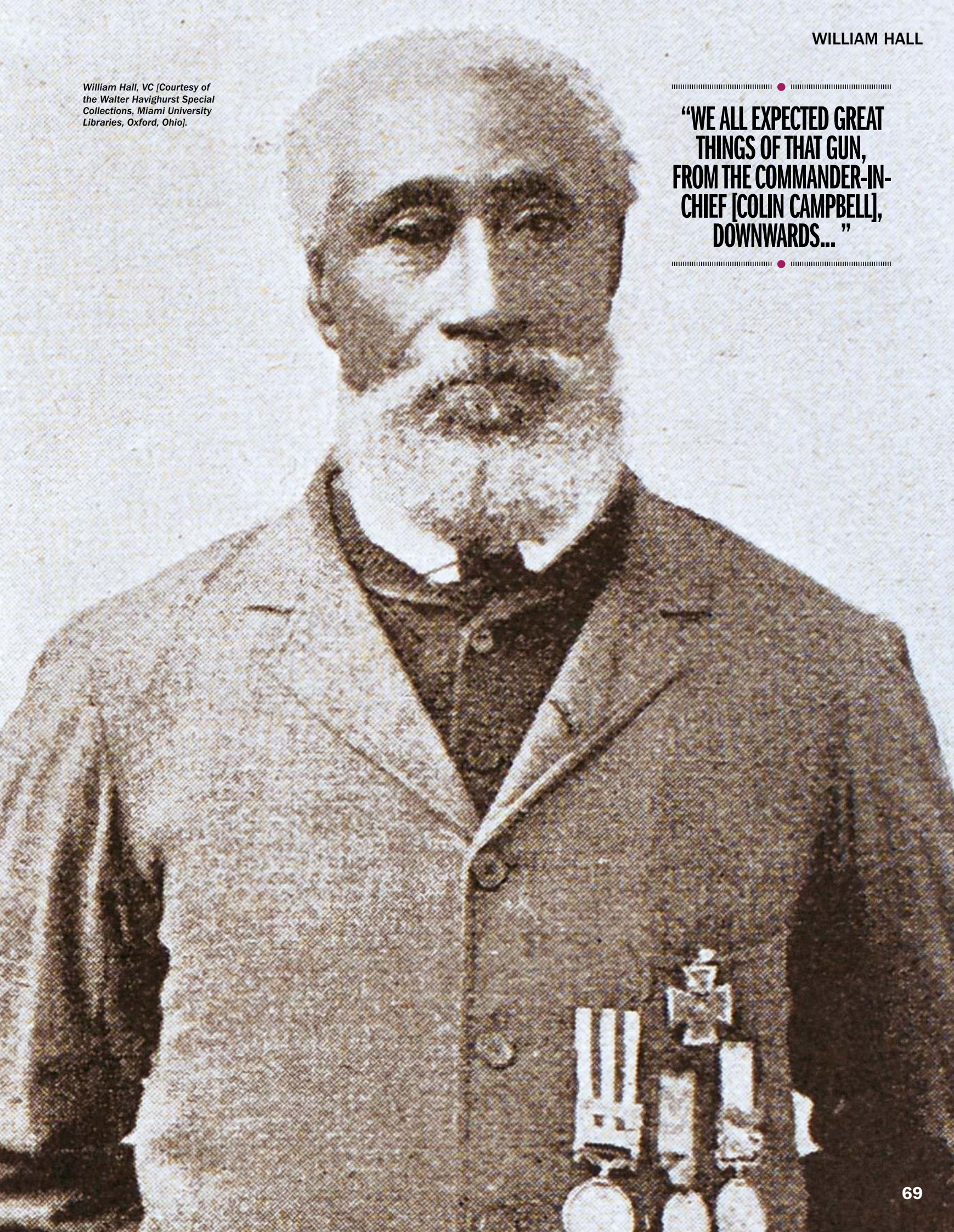
Peel's undersized naval brigade moved overland first to Allahabad, arriving on 14 August, and then marching to Cawnpore on 28 October. The sailors merged with two companies of the 53rd Regiment, one company of the 93rd Highlanders, a detachment of Royal Engineers, and an assorted company of various units. Under the overall command of Lieutenant-Colonel Powell, this 700-man column fought and defeated 2,000 mutineers at Kudjra (Kajwa) on 1 November (Powell was shot through the head and killed, leaving Peel in command of the column). After sweeping this opposition aside, Powell's (Peel's) column united with Sir Colin Campbell's command, advancing in an effort to break through the city of Lucknow and relieve the defenders boxed in at the British Residency.

Campbell's relief column reached the outskirts of Lucknow on 14 November. Instead of driving his way through the centre of the city and risking heavy casualties, Campbell opted swing to its right and advance adjacent to the winding Gomti River. Two days after their arrival, Campbell's column pushed down a road that led to the Lucknow Residency and encountered the Sikandar Bagh, a walled garden and villa. After successfully overrunning this obstacle, Campbell next directed his attention on Shah Najaf. Described as “One of the stoutest defences of the mutineers around Lucknow,” the domed mosque built over the tomb of Ghazi-ud-Din Haidar Shah sat in the centre of a garden, enclosed by a 20 foot-high stone wall



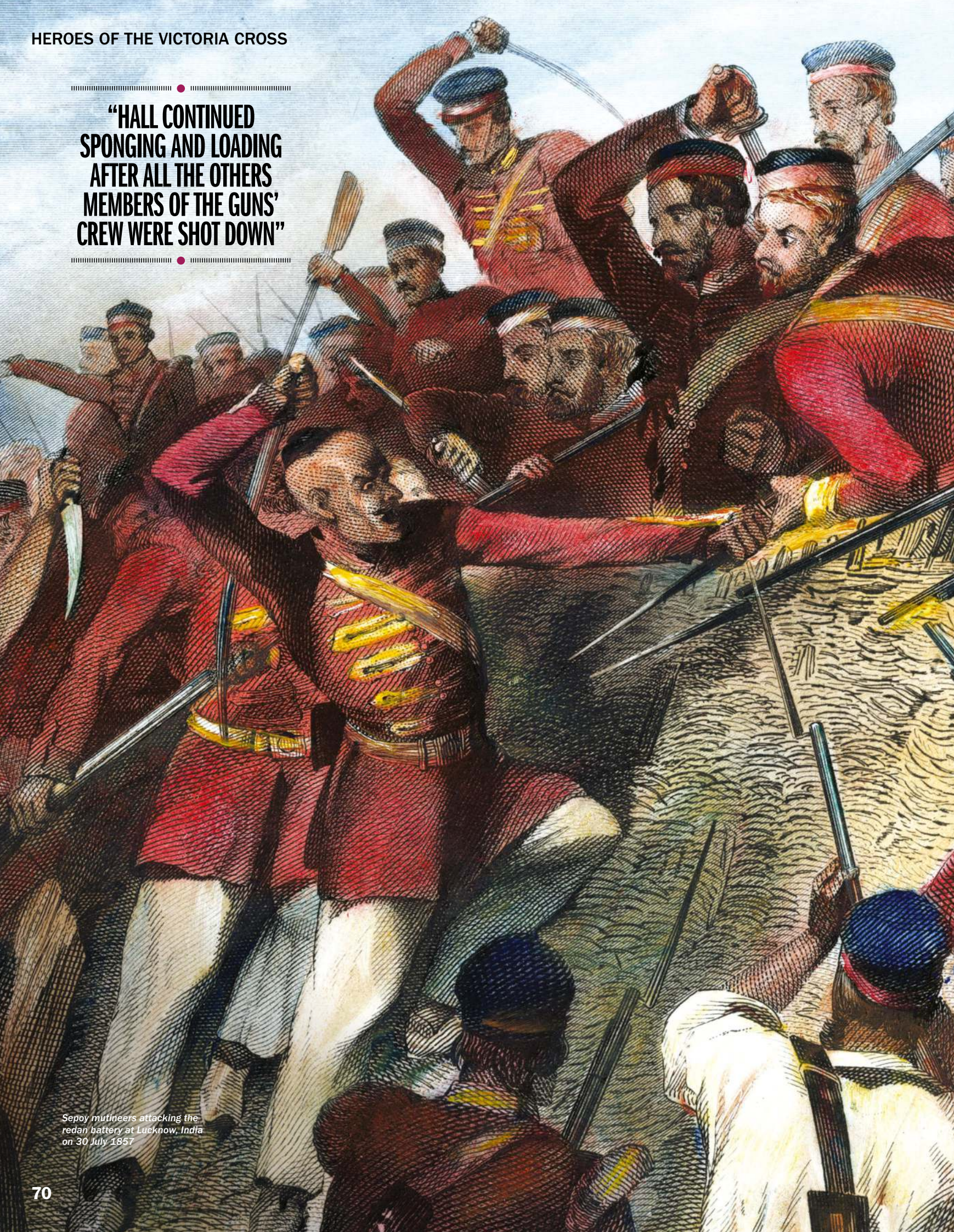
*William Hall, VC [Courtesy of the Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries, Oxford, Ohio].*

“WE ALL EXPECTED GREAT THINGS OF THAT GUN, FROM THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF [COLIN CAMPBELL], DOWNWARDS...”





**"HALL CONTINUED  
SPONGING AND LOADING  
AFTER ALL THE OTHERS'  
MEMBERS OF THE GUNS'  
CREW WERE SHOT DOWN"**



Sepoy mutineers attacking the  
redan battery at Lucknow, India  
on 30 July 1857



guarding its perimeter. The mutineers defending this structure also had the protection of a parapet and sandbags piled high on the outer walls to further beef up its defences.

It was nearly 2:30pm, and Campbell wanted to maintain the successful momentum of the day and secure Shah Najaf before nightfall. Campbell ordered Captain Peel's 24-pounders of the Naval Brigade and Captain Middleton's battery of the Royal Artillery to get as close as possible to wreak havoc on the soft targets and puncture the outer wall. Peel's 24-pounders worked "with redoubled energy" at this lethal range, unleashing a barrage of grape at the southern and eastern parapets. Hall, working with one of these six-man gun crews, remembered rapidly loading and firing off one round after another, the sailors swiftly lugging their guns forward in a repetitive sequence between each shot. This continued until the guns ended up so close to the outer walls that Hall feared being hit by "brick and stone torn by the round shot from the walls we were bombarding."

The charismatic Campbell, mounted on a conspicuous white charger, yanked his sword from its sheath and personally led the 93rd Highlanders to follow close behind the guns. The 93rd had no scaling ladders on hand. They could only idly wait until either Peel's 24-pounders or Middleton's battery breached the stone wall. Meanwhile, the Scotsmen kneeled behind the mud huts of a village positioned directly outside the eastern wall of Shah Najaf, waiting for the order from Campbell to surge forward. The thatched roofs offered little resistance to enemy gunfire, and stray bullets easily shredded through the roofs and cut into the flesh of the infantrymen.

Not having much success shattering a hole in the wall with his artillery fire, Captain Peel ordered Lt Thomas James Young's single gun dragged to within the 12-15 paces of the wall. The sailors assigned to this suicidal task, including Hall, were exposed to withering gunfire, accompanied by exploding hand grenades filled with gunpowder and bits of iron tossed down at them by the mutineers on the

walls. One witness remembered that the enemy bullets smacking against the gun itself made a noise "that which a crowd of schoolboys might make throwing stones at an empty saucepan." Everything was riding on the efforts of this single gun.

Decimated by enemy gunfire, most of the sailors of the gun crumbled to the ground either dead or wounded as they struggled to batter a hole in the wall. As bullets ricocheted off the gun and balls cut through the air, Hall clutched his ramrod and stuck to his post, refusing to allow the gun to fall silent. With his sleeves shoved up his arms, he continued to do the work of two or three men on the gun with machinelike precision. Lieutenant Nowell Salmon, who was awarded a VC that same day for climbing a tree and picking off mutineers trying to silence the lone gun, remembered Hall being "as steady as a rock under fire." Lt Young and Hall miraculously kept the single gun blazing away, despite being the most conspicuous targets on the field.

On the verge of ordering his men to retire, with nightfall fast approaching, Campbell received word that the wall had been breached. He immediately ordered his men forward with fixed bayonets to rush it. Most attribute this breach shot coming from Hall's gun, while some reasoned it could be attributed to the efforts of the other guns or to natural corrosion. Regardless of what caused it, the 93rd Highlanders poured into the mosque's courtyard while the enemy fled out of the rear gate. The successful occupation of Shah Najaf led to Campbell linking up with those trapped at the Residency the next day.

Captain Peel, moved by Hall's selfless heroism during the battle, recommended the humble seaman for the VC. Hall received this honour on 1 February 1859, making him the first black man to receive the empire's highest honor for valour. Along with the medal, Hall continued to receive a pension of £10 a year until his death. He also received the Indian Mutiny Medal for his service. He continued in the service of the Royal Navy until he retired in July 1876.

Hall settled on a small farm in Nova Scotia after his retirement. He lived with and supported two of his sisters, remaining a lifelong bachelor. A journalist by the name of DV Warner, eager to meet the hero of Shah Najaf, paid a visit to Hall's farm in 1901. He found the grizzled hero at work sharpening a scythe.

Hall invited Warner inside his home after a brief introduction, thanking him "for taking note of me." He reached up and grabbed a cardboard spool box from his mantle, dumping the contents on an adjacent table. Clanking against the wood fell a collection of medals, including his VC. Warner mentioned how many men in Her Majesty's empire would have died for this honour (and who had already done so trying to obtain it). Hall gave his visitor a modest response, a trademark of his temperament: "Well, it isn't worth very much to a man after, all, only ten pounds a year. If it wasn't for my regular navy pension of forty pounds a year besides, I don't know how we'd get along here. The farm is small, and my two sisters live with me, you know."

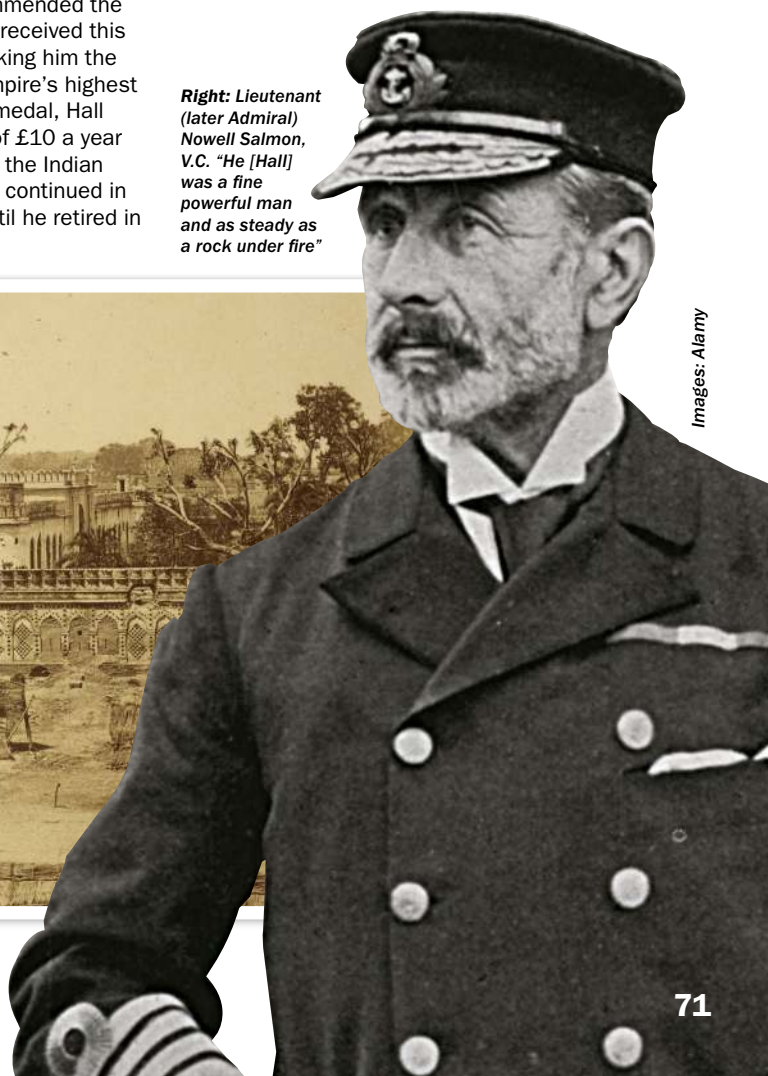
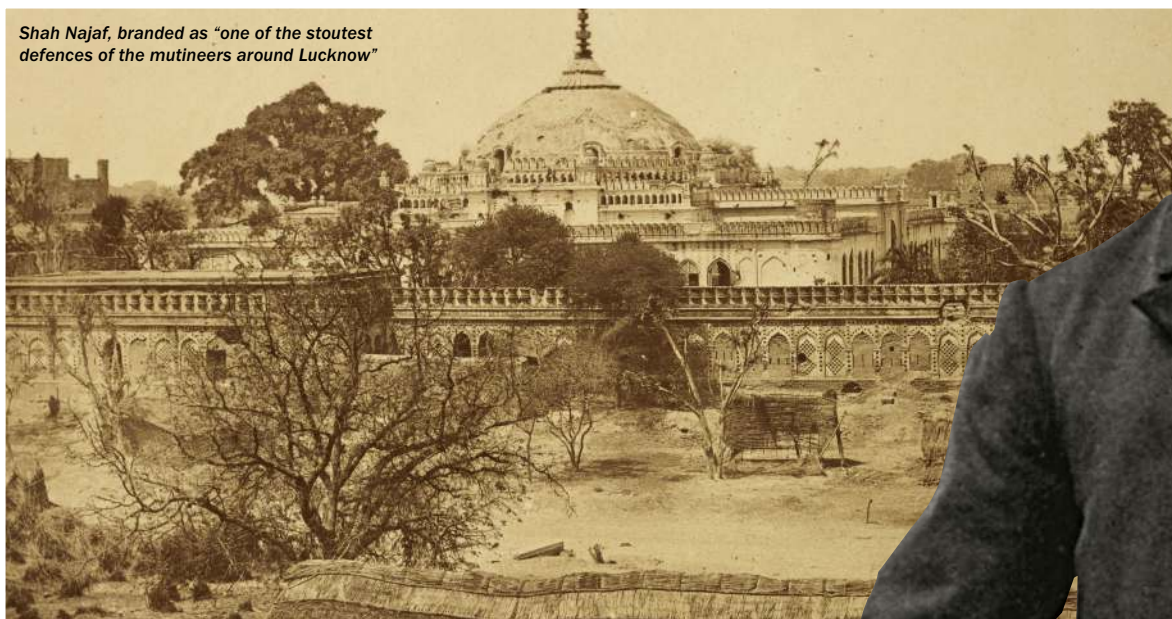
Hall traveled to Halifax to take part in a parade during the visit of Prince George (King George V) in October 1901. This proud black-Canadian with so many medals dangling from his breast caught the attention of the young prince. For a few moments, Hall and Prince George casually shared a few words.

William Hall died at his home three years after Warner's visit and his chance meeting with Prince George on 25 August 1904. Buried in an unmarked grave, in 1954 Hall's remains were removed and re-interred underneath a stone cairn with a bronze plate commemorating his gallant deed.

**Right: Lieutenant (later Admiral) Nowell Salmon, V.C. "He [Hall] was a fine powerful man and as steady as a rock under fire"**

Images: Alamy

*Shah Najaf, branded as "one of the stoutest defences of the mutineers around Lucknow"*





*The T-34 medium tank made its combat debut with the Soviet Red Army in the autumn of 1941*

**"THE GERMANS  
REALISED RAPIDLY  
THAT THE T-34 OUTCLASSSED  
THEIR EXISTING FRONTLINE TANKS"**



# T-34

WORDS MIKE HASKEW

## MEDIUM TANK

This simple but effective tank changed the balance of armoured power on the Eastern Front

**“N**umerous Russian T-34s went into action and inflicted heavy losses on the German tanks at Mzensk in 1941. Up to that time we had enjoyed tank superiority, but from now on the situation was reversed. The prospect of rapid, decisive victories was fading in consequence,” so wrote German General Heinz Guderian, one of the world's foremost experts on armoured warfare, in his post-World War II book *Panzer Leader*.

Guderian realised that the introduction of the Soviet T-34 medium tank on the Eastern

Front meant that for the first time a Red Army tank approached the combat performance of contemporary German tanks, which had previously dominated the battlefield. While the T-34 made its combat debut in November 1941, a new design to replace the older T-26 and BT series tanks had been in the works since 1937, when engineer Mikhail Koshkin was charged with leading a team to design a new generation of tanks at the Kharkiv Komintern Locomotive plant in the Ukraine.

By 1940, the T-34 prototype, designated the A-20, had been developed, but lessons learned during brief battles with the Japanese along the Manchurian border called into question several aspects of the performance of existing Soviet tanks. A second prototype, the A-32, was developed, incorporating these lessons. Koshkin had been individually working with new concepts for a medium tank since 1934 and decided to name the ensuing production model T-34 in a nod to the long trek towards a viable combat design.

The T-34 entered production in 1940 but combat experience resulted in modifications to the original design, including a more powerful main weapon, upgraded from 76.2mm to 85mm, additional armour, and a turret that accommodated three crewmen rather than two. The Germans realised rapidly that the T-34 outclassed their existing frontline tanks, contributing to a surge in German redesign as well.

### T-34 MEDIUM TANK SPECIFICATIONS

COMMISSIONED: 1937 ORIGIN: SOVIET UNION CREW: 4 LENGTH: 6 METRES  
RANGE: 300 KILOMETRES ENGINE: 12-CYLINDER V-2-34 WATER-COOLED DIESEL  
PRIMARY WEAPON: 76.2MM L-11 OR 76.2MM F-34; LATER ZIS-S-53 85MM CANNON  
SECONDARY WEAPON: 2X 7.62MM DT MACHINE GUNS





The Kharkiv Locomotive Factory produced the 12-cylinder V-2-34 engine that powered the T-34

**“THE 12-CYLINDER V-2-34 WATER-COOLED DIESEL ENGINE GENERATED 500 HORSEPOWER AND PRODUCED A TOP SPEED OF 55 KILOMETRES PER HOUR”**

*Below: Numerous components of the primary T-34 engine were adapted from the preceding BT series of tanks. Due to engine shortages, early T-34s were powered by a license-built copy of the German BMW VI piston engine*

## ENGINE

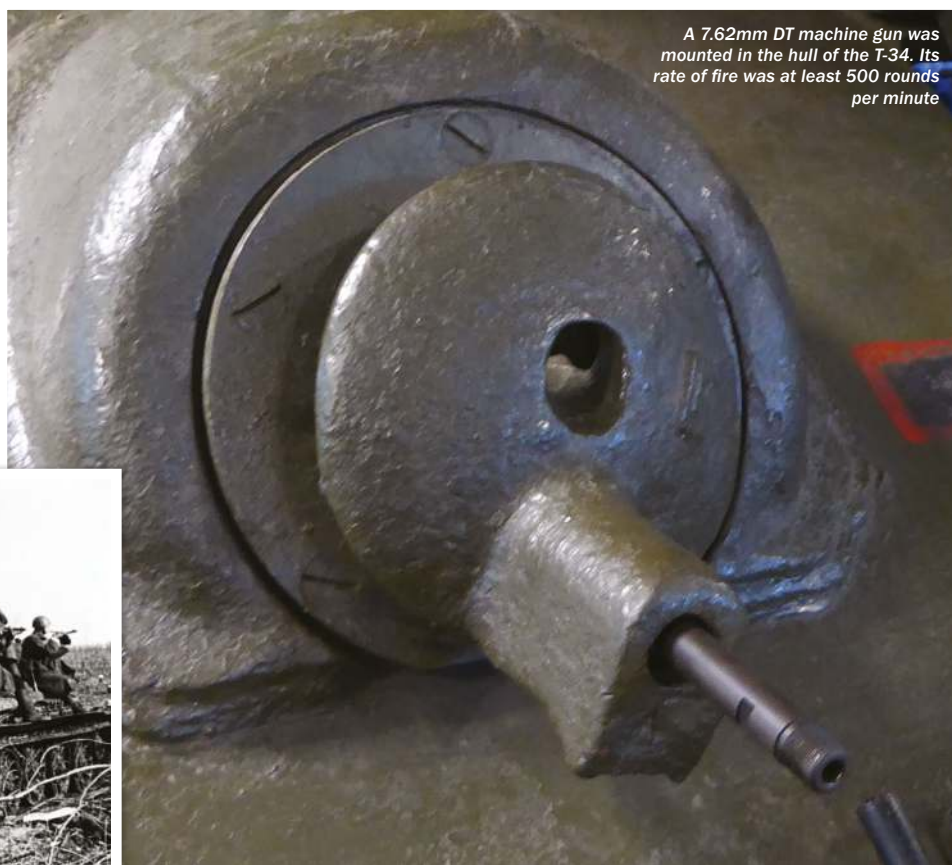
The 12-cylinder V-2-34 water-cooled diesel engine generated 500 horsepower and produced a top speed of 55 kilometres per hour. The engine was designed at the Kharkiv Locomotive Factory and was in high demand for numerous Red Army armoured vehicles. Its hull mounts, clutch and other features were modified from the BT series for the T-34. An early shortage of the V-2-34 engine compelled manufacturers to fit the first T-34s with the MT-17 petrol engine, an adaptation of the license-built German BMW VI piston engine originally designed for aircraft, which was already in standard usage with earlier Soviet medium and light tanks.





## ARMAMENT

The T-34 was originally armed with the L-11 76.2mm cannon. This was subsequently upgraded to the 76.2mm L-34, which provided greater muzzle velocity and penetrating power against German armour. Although the L-34 was capable of penetrating the armour of early German tanks at moderate distances, a new generation of enemy tanks with thicker armour was introduced as the war progressed. The Soviets installed the ZiS-S-53 85mm cannon, with even greater firepower in a reconfigured turret, and the T-34/85 entered production in 1944. A pair of 7.62mm DT machine guns were mounted in the turret and hull for protection against infantry and anti-tank weapons.



A 7.62mm DT machine gun was mounted in the hull of the T-34. Its rate of fire was at least 500 rounds per minute



Left: Soviet soldiers ride into battle on the decks of T-34s. The T-34 became the spearhead of the Red Army

**“A PAIR OF 7.62MM DT MACHINE GUNS WERE MOUNTED IN THE TURRET AND HULL FOR PROTECTION AGAINST INFANTRY AND ANTI-TANK WEAPONS”**

Originally equipped with the L-11 76.2mm cannon, the T-34 was eventually upgraded to the powerful ZiS-S-53 85mm cannon





A Soviet tank commander strikes a resolute pose beside his crewmen. The T-34 was engineered with little attention to the comfort of the crew

**"THE FOUR-MAN CREW INCLUDED THE COMMANDER, TURRET GUNNER, DRIVER, AND BOW MACHINE GUNNER"**



*Right: Painted in white camouflage against a winter landscape, T-34s line up as far as the eye can see*

## CREW COMPARTMENT

The early T-34 interior was cramped and poorly designed. The four-man crew included the commander, turret gunner, driver and bow machine gunner. Ergonomically, the two-man turret configuration required the commander to load the main weapon, reducing the tank's combat efficiency, as did the lack of a turret basket. The driver sat forwards in the hull on the left and operated the T-34 with tillers. By the spring of 1944, the redesigned T-34/85 was introduced with a three-man turret based on that of the KV-85 series of heavy tanks and the addition of a fifth crewman to load the 85mm cannon.





## T-34 MEDIUM TANK



The T-34's design incorporated sloped armour and a suspension system designed by US engineer Walter Christie

### DESIGN

The design of the 26.5-tonne T-34 medium tank emanated from the earlier BT series and began taking shape in the mid-1930s. Its distinctive squat silhouette offered a minimal target to enemy gunners, and sloped armour up to 52mm thick provided enhanced protection. The Christie coil spring suspension was actually engineered

by American Walter Christie and rejected by the US Army. Initially, the T-34 was equipped with rubber road wheels, but material shortages resulted in later production vehicles utilising steel rims. With the introduction of the T-34/85, electrical turret traverse and an upgraded transmission enhanced performance, along with the more powerful main weapon.

### SERVICE HISTORY

WIDELY CONSIDERED THE FINEST TANK OF WORLD WAR II, THE T-34 WAS THE PIVOTAL SOVIET WEAPON ON THE EASTERN FRONT

More than 57,000 examples of the T-34 and its variants were manufactured during World War II, making it the most highly produced tank of the conflict. The T-34 became a lasting symbol of the Soviet victory on the Eastern Front and enabled the Red Army to counter the might of Nazi panzer divisions during its resurgence and relentless westward advance towards the German capital of Berlin.

When the T-34 reached the battlefield in the autumn of 1941, it came as a nasty surprise to German armoured units, whose tanks had enjoyed a significant qualitative advantage over earlier Soviet designs. The T-34, with its 76.2mm gun, brought some parity to tank versus tank encounters. More than a match for the earlier German PzKpfw. III and IV tanks, the T-34 spurred German engineers to develop the PzKpfw. V and VI, the famed Panther medium and Tiger I heavy tanks.

While the early 76mm L-11 and F-34 guns brought substantial muzzle velocity, German 75mm and 88mm

cannon were consistently capable of knocking out Soviet tanks at virtually standoff distances. Therefore, Soviet tank units often closed with enemy armour in rapid, sometimes uncoordinated, charges. Experience during the great Battle of Kursk in the summer of 1943 resulted in the introduction of the T-34/85 with its numerous improvements the following spring. During one memorable encounter, a lone T-34/85 proved its capabilities against three German Tigers, firing from concealment and destroying all three enemy tanks.

Although losses were staggering, Soviet industry maintained a steady flow of T-34s and other armoured vehicles to the frontline throughout World War II. Proven in combat, T-34 variants remained in production until 1958, and more than 84,000 were eventually manufactured. The tank served with Communist forces during the Korean War and with the armed forces of Soviet satellite states and other nations into the 21st century.

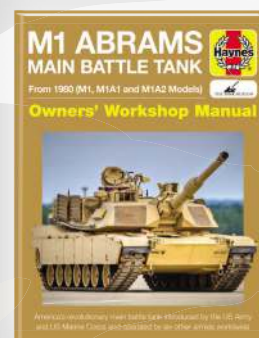
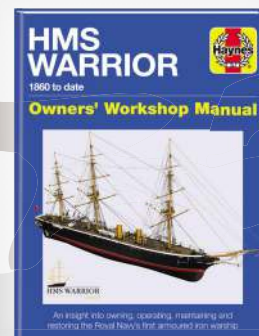


The T-34 remained in service after World War II and was a Cold War stalwart of the Eastern Bloc

Images: Alamy, Getty



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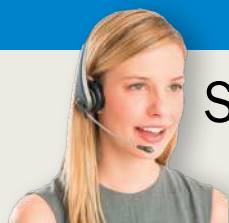
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# DESTINATION NORMANDY

WORDSTIM WILLIAMSON

From the D-Day beach assaults to the devastating final shots in the Falaise Pocket, this region is home to some of the most important battlefields and landmarks in European history

**N**ormandy is a region steeped in history, from the staging ground of the conquest of England in the 11th century, to the liberation of Europe in 1944. For anyone passionate about the history of WWII in particular, of course, there are a huge number of commemorative sites, museums and battlefields to explore, from the well-known to the more obscure.

To coincide with the 73rd anniversary of the D-Day landings, History of War was invited on a short tour of Normandy, to experience what the region has to offer those in search of reflection, exploration and remembrance. Here are just a few incredible locations to add to any itinerary, each of which has its own unique part in the story of D-Day.





## BACK TO THE BEACHES

IN JUNE 2017 THE TAXI CHARITY FOR MILITARY VETERANS MOUNTED AN INCREDIBLE CAMPAIGN TO TRANSPORT BRITISH VETERANS BACK TO NORMANDY ONE LAST TIME

On 4 June 2017, a convoy of 90 black cabs, all driven by volunteer London cabbies, set off from the Royal Hospital Chelsea with over 200 veterans and carers – their destination: Normandy. In an astonishing triumph of logistics, the convoy stopped off at Pegasus Bridge, Ranville war cemetery and Bayeux Cathedral for a Royal British Legion service during its four-day tour of the region. The Charity says this will be the final trip of its scale, as the number of veterans diminishes and those remaining are unable to make the journey.

Founded in 1948, the Charity originally supported injured and disabled cabbies returning from the frontline, but later expanded its remit to all the armed forces, organising recreational trips to seaside spots, such as Worthing and Brighton. It now arranges annual trips, entertainment and support for British military veterans of all conflicts.

To learn more about the charity and how you can donate, visit: [www.taxicharity.org](http://www.taxicharity.org)

**Right:** The Taxi Charity for Military Veterans was founded in 1948 and continues to support those who served during WWII



## UTAH

A LATE ADDITION TO OPERATION OVERLORD, THIS SITE SAW THE BEGINNING OF THE MARCH TO CHERBOURG, AND HAS A CURIOUS CONNECTION WITH TEXAS

First opened in 1962, the Utah Beach Musée de Débarquement is located on the exact site where the first soldiers of the US 4th Infantry Division landed at 0630 on 6 June. 600 men arrived in 20 LCPVs over a mile south of their planned point of attack due to unexpectedly strong currents in the Channel. "We'll start the war right here!" Brigadier General Theodore Roosevelt Jr famously declared.

Part of the main building of the Museum itself is in fact built within an original German bunker, a strongpoint along the Atlantic Wall with the designation WN5. On 6 June, there were just 75 Germans defending the position.

German resistance was relatively light at Utah, and the defenders quickly became overwhelmed with paratroopers of the 82nd and 101st Airborne, which had dropped in behind their lines during the early hours of the morning. In the event the beach was taken in just 45 minutes, but it would be three weeks before the objective of the port city of Cherbourg would be liberated. However, the retreating Germans left the port in ruins, putting it out of action for months.

One critical element of the victory at Utah was the accurate bombing runs made by the US Air Force, which weakened the German defenses before the main assault began. Major David Dewhurst, squadron commander of the 386th

**"ONE CRITICAL ELEMENT OF THE VICTORY AT UTAH WAS THE ACCURATE BOMBING RUNS MADE BY THE US AIR FORCE"**

Bomb Group, made the very last of these runs at 0625, just five minutes before the infantry were due to arrive. Over 60 years later, his two sons David and Gene, visited the Museum and recognised a photograph of their father with his B-26 Marauder, the "Dina Might". This began a long relationship between the siblings and the Museum, which they helped fund and expand.

Today it is home to an original B-26 in the same D-Day stripes and markings of Dewhurst's "Dinah Might", in honour of his part in the operation. Elsewhere is an original and restored LCPV, or Higgins Boat, as well as an amphibious landing vehicle that was abandoned on the beach after the landing. One of the more obscure objects on display is an original remote-controlled tracked mine, or Goliath, discovered by the Americans on the beach. These small, explosive machines were designed to be remotely driven towards enemy vehicles, infantry formations or buildings, before detonating.

For more information on the Utah Beach Museum, visit: [www.utah-beach.com](http://www.utah-beach.com)

**Below:** The Museum is at the centre of annual commemorative ceremonies as well as festivities celebrating the liberation

On 4 June 2017, 197 lanterns were released over Utah Beach - one for each of the US soldiers killed during the landings there



**Right:** An original B-26 Marauder painted in D-Day stripes and the marking's of David Dewhurst's original plane, the "Dinah Might"





**"ATOP THE PLATEAU AT COLLEVILLE-SUR-MER  
NOW LIE OVER 9,300 AMERICAN SERVICEMEN  
WHO MADE THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE DURING  
THE NORMANDY CAMPAIGN"**



*View from the Garden of the Missing, through  
to the sculpture, The Spirit of American Youth  
Rising From The Waves*

## OMAHA

**OVER 3,000 US SOLDIERS WERE KILLED STORMING THIS STRONGHOLD,  
TODAY THE LOCATION OF THE NORMANDY AMERICAN CEMETERY & MEMORIAL**

## THE JUNO BEACH CENTRE



Often overlooked in the history of D-Day are the 14,000 Canadians who fought on 6 June itself, as well the thousands more who took part in the Battle of Normandy and beyond. The Juno Beach Centre is a not-for-profit museum and memorial to all Canadians who fought and died during WWII. The centre's permanent exhibition tells the story not only of Canadian involvement in the war, but also in the impact of the conflict on this young nation.

**For more information visit:  
[www.junobeach.org](http://www.junobeach.org)**

Unquestionably the most infamous of the D-Day beaches, on 6 June Omaha was heavily defended by the 352. Infanterie-Division, which included many veterans returned from the Russian front. Ahead of the Americans was approximately 500 metres of open beach, littered with large obstacles – wooden stakes and metal 'Czech Hedgehogs' – intended to obstruct amphibious landings and vehicles.

The Germans occupied over a dozen main defensive positions along the beach, commanding the high ground of a plateau south of Omaha, parallel to the villages of Vierville-sur-Mer, Colleville-sur-Mer and Saint-Laurent-sur-Mer. From here they were able to bring down highly effective sniper and mortar fire, as well as withering machine-gun fire, which proved devastating for the initial waves of American troops.

Atop the plateau at Colleville-sur-Mer now lie over 9,300 American servicemen who made the ultimate sacrifice during the Normandy campaign. Among them lies Theodore Roosevelt Jr, who succumbed to a heart attack not more than a month after leading his men onto Utah beach – he is buried next to his brother Quentin, a fighter pilot who was killed in combat in 1918.

Overlooking the cemetery is 'The Spirit of American Youth Rising From The Waves' – a 22-foot-tall bronze statue – behind which is the Garden of the Missing, where those soldiers whose bodies were never found or identified are commemorated – over 1,557 names line the walls of the garden.

**For more information, visit: [www.abmc.gov](http://www.abmc.gov)**



*Right: Lieutenant Colonel James Earl Rudder led the Rangers up the cliffs of Pointe du Hoc on 6 June*



## POINT DU HOC RANGER MONUMENT

ONE OF THE MOST DARING MISSIONS IN THE ASSAULT ON Fortress Europe saw US Rangers pushed to the edge of human endurance

At 0708 on 6 June, 190 men of the 2nd Rangers Battalion, led by Lt Col James Earl Rudder, fired grappling hooks to the top of the 100-foot cliffs of Pointe du Hoc, and began their dangerous ascent towards the German positions above. Their objective was six 155mm cannons, each with a range of 12 miles that could have brought down devastating fire upon both Utah (8 miles to the north-west) and Omaha (4 miles to the east). Ironically, these guns had been transported cross-country from the Maginot Line after the fall of France.

Today, the Ranger Monument commemorates

the competence, courage and sacrifice of the Rangers who fought that day, of which only 90 survived the vicious fighting. Much of the original fortifications and gun positions are still in place as they were in 1944, and the surroundings are peppered with the same shell craters that Rudder and his men would have fought across. Visiting Pointe Du Hoc not only provides a strong insight into the importance of the position – with sweeping views across the Normandy coastline – but also an appreciation of the enormous and perilous task the Rangers faced.

For more information, visit: [www.abmc.gov](http://www.abmc.gov)

*The 'lunar landscape' of Pointe Du Hoc is still visible today, giving visitors a real sense of the devastation caused during the battle*

*One of the gun emplacements at the Pointe. The guns themselves had already been moved inland before the arrival of the Rangers*



*The sculpture of Lord Lovat, commander of No. 4 Commando at Sword Beach on 6 June*

## OUISTREHAM & COMMANDO KIEFFER

THE EASTERNMOST OVERLORD SECTOR IS TO BE THE HOME OF A NEW MEMORIAL MUSEUM DEDICATED TO THE BRITISH TROOPS

From 0725 on 6 June, the first elements of the 3rd Infantry Division began landing at Sword beach, along with the 47th Armoured Brigade and the 1st Special Service Brigade led by Brigadier the Lord Lovat. It was the first step of what would be a long and bloody struggle to liberate Caen.

Although Sword is known as a British landing site, the first to reach the beach were in fact Frenchmen. Landing at the head of Lovat's commandos were 177 Free French soldiers, the 1st Battalion Fusiliers Marins Commando, led by Lieutenant Commander Philippe Kieffer. Arriving in the UK after the fall of France, Kieffer became impressed by the newly created British commando units, and was granted permission to form his own unit comprised of all Free French soldiers. Commando Kieffer, as the unit subsequently became known, successfully assaulted German fortified positions on the beachhead, before moving to Pegasus Bridge in the afternoon – the unit suffered 41 casualties during the day.

Today, over a million passengers pass through Ouistreham's ferry terminal each year, making it one of the most popular routes for visitors to Normandy. In 2014 the port town welcomed Queen Elizabeth II and other dignitaries, to commemorate

the 70th anniversary of D-Day. It was at this time that plans began for a new memorial museum, honouring the British troops who fought on Sword Beach, while also exploring the centuries of Anglo-Franco relations. The 15-million-Euro project is due to be completed in 2019.

For more information visit: [ouistreham-rivabella.fr](http://ouistreham-rivabella.fr) and [www.brittany-ferries.co.uk](http://www.brittany-ferries.co.uk)

*Below: The Free French Monument, known as 'La Flamme' is dedicated to the men of Commando Kieffer who took part in the landings at Sword*





## CLOSING THE POCKET

**IN AUGUST 1944, MEN OF THE 1ST POLISH ARMoured DIVISION MOUNTED A VALIANT DEFENCE AT MONT ORMEL, KNOWN AS HILL 262 NORTH**

By 13 August 1944, roughly 150,000 troops of the 7th German Army were encircled in what was later known as the Falaise Pocket, in southern Normandy. With the American 90th Division moving up from the south, and British and Canadian forces arriving from the north and north-west, the 1st Polish Armoured Division (part of the 1st Canadian Army) was tasked with closing the German lines of retreat to the east in the area between Falaise in the north-west and Chambois to the south-east.

During the retreat, thousands of German troops, armour, artillery and horses became caught in the narrowing route leading north-east towards Vimoutiers, which became known as the Corridor of Death. By the end of the fighting, some 200 tanks and 1,000 artillery pieces were destroyed by Allied fire.

Also standing in the way of this retreat was the high ground of Mont Ormel ridge, comprising of Hill 262 North and South. Between 18-22 August, German forces fell upon the Polish positions, forcing them back to the very summit of Mont Ormel, where, low on ammunition, they eventually were forced to engage in vicious hand-to-hand fighting, defending themselves day and night.

Over 50,000 Germans managed to escape during the Battle of the Falaise Pocket, many of them slipping past the besieged Poles on Mont Ormel. These men would go on to hamper the Allied advance east, however some 10,000 of their comrades lay dead in the field and many more had surrendered. The Poles dubbed the Battle of Hill 262 as Maczuga or 'The Mace', and it is considered to be the last pitched battle of the Normandy campaign.

The site is now home to the Montormel Memorial Museum, which provides the same commanding view of the valley and the plains below that the Polish defenders would have seen. The surrounding countryside visitors look down on today is in fact the site of several large unmarked graves, the final resting place of German soldiers who lost their lives.

**For more information visit: [www.normandy-tourism.org](http://www.normandy-tourism.org)**

## "SOME 200 TANKS AND 1,000 ARTILLERY PIECES WERE DESTROYED BY ALLIED FIRE"

*The memorial at Montormel is dedicated primarily to the 1st Polish Armoured Division, but also all the Allied liberators*



*The last German surrender in the Battle of Normandy took place in the village of Tournai-sur-Dives*



**Above: Destroyed Polish and German tanks near Mont Ormel, pictured after the battle**



**Above: Polish Infantry move towards Hill 262, 20 August 1944**

*Images: Alamy, Getty*





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# ETA

## EUROPE'S INSURGENCY

Despite Spain's transition to democracy after Franco, the Basque region has been a hotbed of terrorism for decades. But with declining support for separatism and more effective policing, have the fighters renounced the gun?

WORDS TOM FARRELL

**I**n April 2017 the locations of the eight caches of weaponry were symbolically handed over to police in a town hall in the French city of Bayonne. The caches included 130 handguns, two tons of explosives and several thousand rounds of ammunition.

Earlier the same year, the Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA), the Basque Country and Liberty, announced it was handing in its weapons, six years after the cessation of active hostilities. This potentially marks the end of Europe's longest conflict, the ETA campaign having begun in 1959. However, there are still areas of contention that may arise in negotiations over a permanent peace, and it is uncertain if ETA's entire arsenal has been handed over. The leadership is calling for the release of approximately 350 imprisoned members and an amnesty for its operatives.

Moreover, ETA has not renounced the objective of an independent Basque state. In an April communiqué printed by the ETA-affiliated Gara newspaper, the organisation stated that independence "Wasn't going to be a bargaining chip, but rather a way to show the intransigence of the (Spanish and French) states and to further the independence movement."

The disputed area borders the Bay of Biscay and the western foothills of the Pyrenees. The conflict has killed around 1,000 people, 829 of them the victims of ETA. But support for the cause of an independent state is dwindling. A poll last October revealed that only 29 per cent of the Basque population favours an independent state, with 37 per cent preferring the current status quo. Within Spain itself, the comunidad autónoma (autonomous community) of the Basque Country, home to around 2 million people, has its own parliament, police force, education and tax systems. But these concessions have not, until now perhaps, brought about a permanent peace.

### Roots of Basque Nationalism

Like the conflict that has afflicted it, the Basque region is something of an anomaly. The Basque people were referenced by Roman chroniclers, and seem to have become isolated from other European races thousands of years ago. As late as the 10th century, many of them still clung to Animist beliefs, although they would later become strict Catholics.

Moreover, the Basque language is outside the Indo-European family, and bears virtually no resemblance to any other dialect. Traditionally, Basque culture has been centred on the

## THE BASQUE REBELS

**1959**

Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) 'Basque Homeland and Liberty' emerges out of the Partido Nacionalista Vasco (PNV) 'Basque Nationalist Party', and adopts a programme inspired by Marxist and Third World liberation movements.

**20 December 1973**

Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco, the heir apparent to General Francisco Franco, is assassinated by ETA while returning from Mass in Madrid.

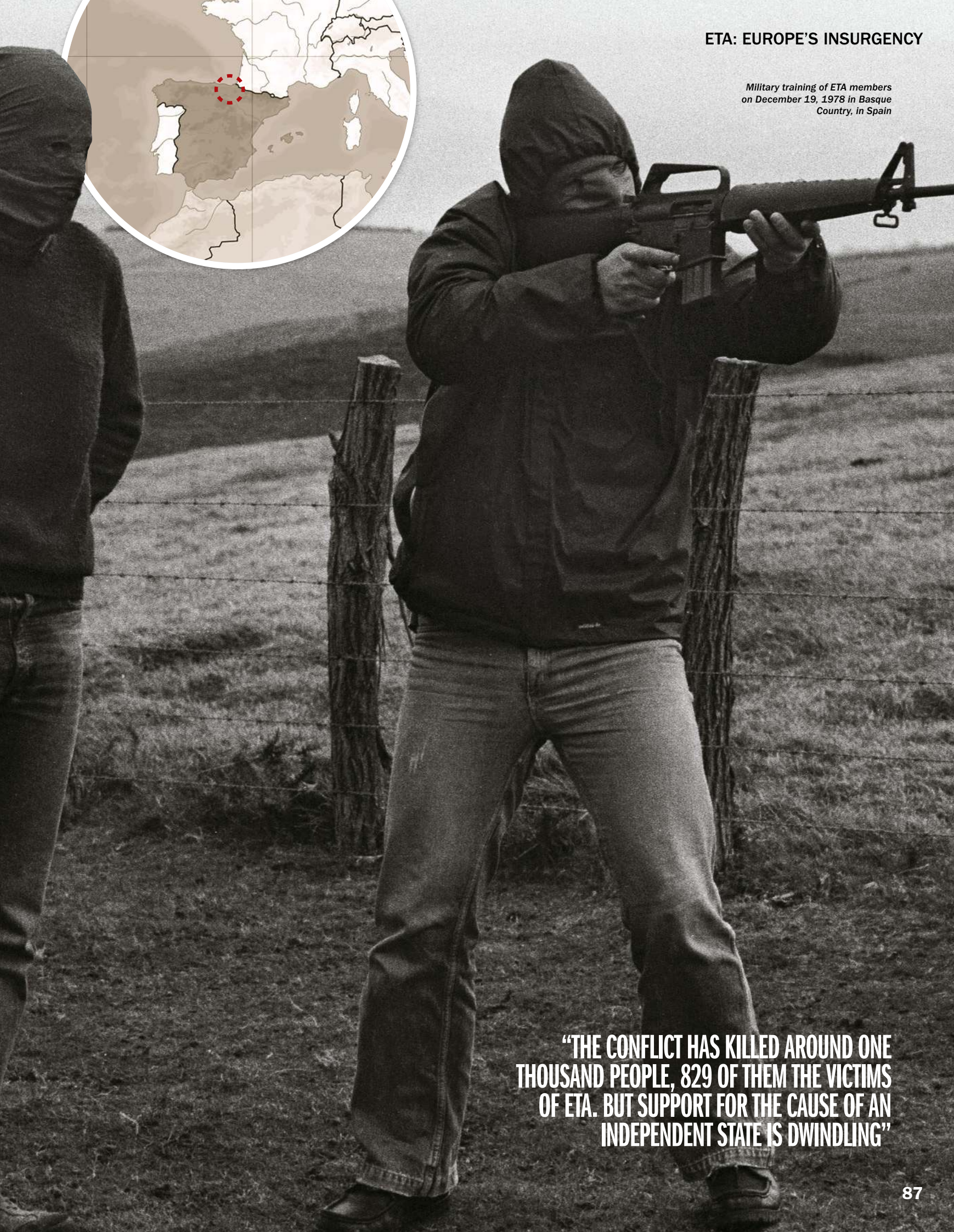
**November 1975**

Franco dies, and the liberal monarchy under King Juan Carlos I enacts a democratisation process with Adolfo Suarez as prime minister, promising autonomy for the Basque Country.





*Military training of ETA members  
on December 19, 1978 in Basque  
Country, in Spain*



**"THE CONFLICT HAS KILLED AROUND ONE THOUSAND PEOPLE, 829 OF THEM THE VICTIMS OF ETA. BUT SUPPORT FOR THE CAUSE OF AN INDEPENDENT STATE IS DWINDLING"**



caserío (farmstead), although the Basques have long been enthusiastic seafarers, well represented in both the Age of Exploration and the expansion of the Spanish empire.

But the Basque people have traditionally been hostile to attempts to amalgamate the region into a centralised Spanish state. In the early 19th century they supported the conservative pretender to the throne, Don Carlos – a gambit that would ultimately backfire badly over the ensuing decades.

In 1931, the declaration of the Second Spanish Republic divided the Basques. The provinces of Guipúzcoa, Álava and Vizcaya were prepared to accept autonomy within the left-leaning Republic, and the city of Bilbao became the capital of a devolved Basque region.

After 17 July 1936, a coup by Nationalist military officers committed to monarchism, Catholicism, anti-communism and anti-liberalism plunged Spain into civil war. Some Basque provinces, including Navarra and parts of Álava, supported the Nationalists with troops, and heavy fighting raged around Bilbao. The Nationalists were backed by the emerging Fascist powers of Europe, and the Basque stronghold of Guernica, bombed by the Luftwaffe's Condor Legion and the Italian Legionary Air Force in April 1937, became a symbol of the Civil War's horror. Hundreds of civilians were killed, and the bombing was immortalised by the painting Guernica by Pablo Picasso.

The war ended in April 1939 with a Nationalist victory, and in October of that year, General Francisco Franco was recognised as Caudillo (leader) by the Junta de defensa nacional (National Defence Committee). Any concessions by the Republicans were reversed, and hundreds of Basques who had surrendered to Francoist troops and their Italian allies in August 1937 were sentenced to death.

At this point, the main vehicle for Basque nationalism had been the Partido Nacionalista Vasco (PNV) Basque Nationalist Party, founded in the 1890s. Despite an ideology that was nationalist, Catholic and largely conservative, the PNV had supported the Republic, and over 22,000 Basques had fought in units at the behest of the autonomous region's first president, José Antonio Aguirre.

Under Franco, the PNV was forced underground, and Aguirre relocated to New York and Paris. The year before his death in March 1960, a new faction emerged: ETA.

## After Franco

The expansion of ETA came in an era where the last enclaves of European colonialism were succumbing to wars of national liberation, frequently instigated by Marxist-Leninist groups. Having witnessed revolutionary movements prevail in Cuba, Vietnam and Algeria during the Fifties and early Sixties, and

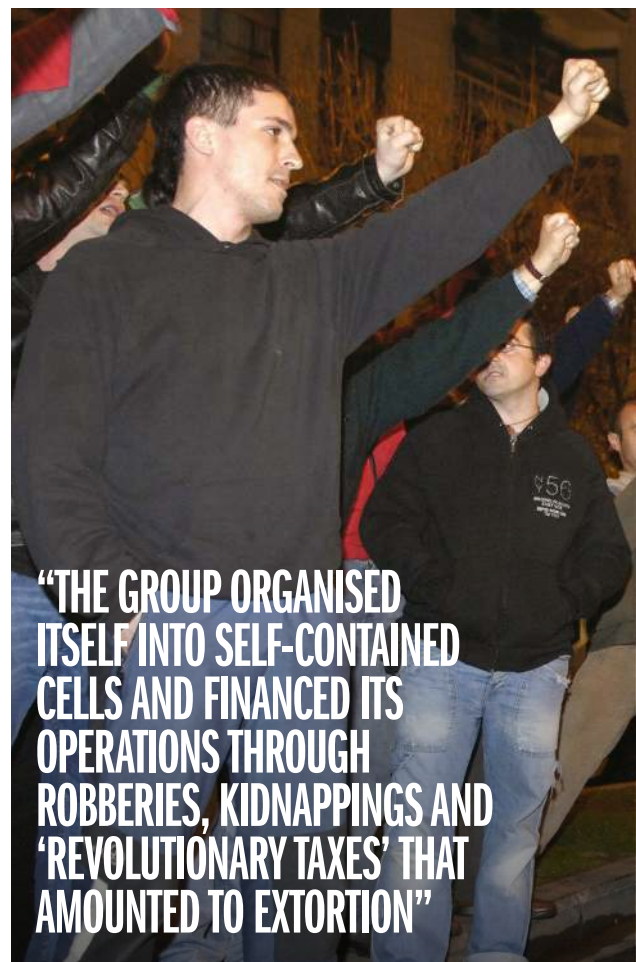
exasperated by the seemingly indolent and ineffectual stance of the PNV, younger Basque radicals argued for an armed rebellion.

After ETA's fifth conference in 1966, clear divisions emerged between the nationalist and Marxist elements in the movement that would lead to a split eight years later. ETA executed its first assassination in the town of San Sebastian in 1968, and predictably the Franco regime enacted a brutal crackdown; by 1970, the original leadership was arrested and put on trial by the military in the city of Burgos. Only massive protest marches and international attention prevented their executions.

The proliferation of ETA in the Seventies was somewhat paradoxical. During the Sixties, Spain experienced an economic boom and industrialisation in the Basque region that lifted most people's living standards. But as the middle class expanded, thousands of foreign tourists arrived from more liberal regimes and Europe began integrating, Franco's Spain seemed ever more stagnant and reactionary. Yet after Franco's death in 1975, ETA militancy actually increased, even after the first free elections in 41 years. These were won by the Unión de Centro Democrático (Union of the Democratic Centre), led by Adolfo Suárez.

With the restoration of democracy under Suárez and the reformist King Juan Carlos, Madrid once again planned for autonomy in the Basque territories after the 1978 Constitution had been ratified. But this time, the government faced opposition from the Ko-ordinadora Abertzale Sozialista (KAS) Co-ordinated Patriotic Socialists, a political bloc that included ETA and several factions that had grown out of it. The KAS has formed in the final months of Franco's rule and distanced itself from the PNV. Three years later, a new coalition of left-wing Basque parties emerged called Herri Batsuna. It campaigned for a 'no' vote in the December 1978 referendum, and in the following year's general election won 170,000 votes in the Basque territory. Herri Batsuna was consistently accused of acting as ETA's political wing.

The late Seventies would witness the most violent phase of the conflict, with up to 100 deaths per year. Typically, ETA would conduct kidnappings, assassinations and car-bomb attacks. Their targets included politicians, businessmen, judges, police officers, journalists and suspected informants. The group organised itself into self-contained cells, and financed its operations through robberies, kidnappings and 'revolutionary taxes' that amounted to extortion. By the end of the decade, some Basque groups operated in the south of France, and the militancy partially



### 6 December 1978

A new liberal Spanish constitution is ratified after a referendum. Left-wing Basque parties have campaigned for a 'no' vote, claiming it does not address their grievances.

### 1980

ETA-Político Militar, a left-wing faction that broke from the main body of ETA in 1974, announces an end to its use of violence.

### February 1981

Members of the Civil Guards and Army make a failed bid to take over the Congress of Deputies in the Palace of the Parliament, Madrid.

### 17 October 1983

Beginning of the 'Dirty War' by the Grupos Antiterroristas de Liberación (GAL) 'Anti-terrorist Liberation Groups' with the kidnapping and killing of two ETA members.

### 20 November 1984

Herri Batsuna politician Santiago Brouard, who is also the deputy mayor of Bilbao, is assassinated by right-wing gunmen.



### Early 1989

Talks take place between the government and ETA in Algiers, aimed at greater co-operation between French and Spanish authorities in combating ETA.





Pro-independence Basque group Askatasuna members hold the first in front of the Basque police



Left: Relatives of imprisoned ETA members on a protest walk in San Sebastian, Donostia, 2003



Below: A mural in Northern Ireland supporting the ETA

inspired a low level of insurgency in the Catalan region of Spain.

Moreover, ETA was now making contacts with underground revolutionary groups in Europe, most significantly, the Provisional IRA. Starting in mid 1974, the two groups swapped weapons and their respective political wings exchanged delegations. But unlike the contemporaneous 'Troubles' of Northern Ireland, the Spanish never occupied the Basque region with troops or imposed direct rule from Madrid.

## Dirty War

At this point, ETA's most audacious assassination had been that of Franco's prime minister Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco, killed in Madrid in December 1973 when a remote-controlled device exploded as his car passed. He died just as the trials of ten leading opponents of the regime, one a Catholic priest, were about to begin. His car was flung into the air and landed on the second-storey balcony of a nearby Jesuit college.

In December 1978, one of the ETA hit squad that targeted Carrero Blanco, an operative known by the alias of Argala (Slim), was assassinated in southern France by an extreme right-wing group organised from within Spanish Naval intelligence. This illustrated the proliferation of far-right paramilitaries in the early post-Franco years, particularly in the Basque region. These included the Alianza Apostólica Anti-comunista (Triple A), the Guerrilleros de Christo Rey (Warriors of Christ the King), the Batallón Vasco Español (Basque Spanish Battalion) and Anti-terrorismo ETA.

But ironically, anti-ETA paramilitaries found increased state patronage after Spanish politics turned leftward in October 1982. The Socialist Workers' Party under Felipe González won a decisive victory on a social democratic, pro-European platform. But the Interior Ministry funded a secretive death squad known as the Grupos Anti-terrorist de Liberación (GAL), the Anti-terrorist Liberation Group. On 17 October 1983, two ETA members were kidnapped by GAL, their mutilated bodies turning up in Alicante two years later. At least 27 people were killed by GAL over four years, some of which had no involvement in ETA. The 'dirty war' ended in 1987, the same year ETA executed its deadliest attack, a bomb blast in the Hipercor shopping centre in Barcelona that June, killing 21 people and injuring 45 more.

Investigations by Spanish journalists later revealed GAL links to the highest echelons of the González government. In 1996, the Interior Minister José Barrionuevo and his former deputy Rafael Vera were sentenced to ten years imprisonment for their complicity in GAL killings, although they were later pardoned. Six other politicians and police officers were also prosecuted. The 'dirty war' was a factor in the

### March 1992

The entire ETA leadership is arrested in Bidart, south west France. The lower echelons begin restructuring the organisation.

### April 1995

ETA makes a failed attempt to kill opposition leader José María Aznar by bombing his armoured car. Herri Batasuna does not condemn the attack.



### 10 July 1997

Miguel Ángel Blanco, a People's Party councillor, is kidnapped and killed by ETA. His death provokes nationwide demonstrations. Even some imprisoned ETA members condemn the killing.

### September 1998

ETA calls a ceasefire that collapses after 14 months. Herri Batasuna changes its name to Euskal Herriarrok, and makes electoral gains in the Basque Parliament.



### 21 November 2000

Ernest Lluch, an economist and retired Socialist Workers' Party Minister, is assassinated by ETA at his home in Barcelona.



Socialist defeat in the March 1996 general election, which brought the centre-right Partido Popular (People's Party) to power with José María Aznar as prime minister. In the Basque territory, Aznar's victory was assisted by PNV support.

### Decline in Support

In January 1988, the Pact of Arjuria-Enea was the first cross-party consensus on ending the Basque conflict. Only Herri Batasuna declined to participate, although ETA declared a two-month ceasefire soon afterwards. The pact committed the government to continue counter-terrorism while exploring the possibility of dialogue with those who were prepared to abandon violence. Early the following year, an ETA negotiator travelled to Algiers to meet with representatives of the González government, although these talks went nowhere.

But ETA now faced a number of serious setbacks. Greater co-operation with French authorities resulted in more aggressive policing in southern France, particularly in the Basque département of Pyrénées-Atlantiques. This culminated in the military, political and logistical commanders of ETA being arrested in the French town of Bidart in March 1992. The response of the organisation was to reorganise itself, recruiting youth groups who would start *kale borroka* (street riots) akin to the violent protests in Republican areas of Belfast.

By now there was a greater mobilisation of civil society: the *Gesto por la Paz* (Gesture for Peace) had begun in 1986, and organised silent vigils against violence in a manner similar to Northern Ireland's 'Community for Peace People.' After 1992, a social movement for dialogue called *Elkarri* emerged.

Many of ETA's more brutal attacks alienated even some of its core supporters: on 10 July 1997, militants kidnapped a young People's Party councillor named Miguel Ángel Blanco and demanded that 500 Basque prisoners be released with 48 hours. When the deadline expired he was shot in the back of the head and dumped on a roadside, dying the following day. The murder sparked nationwide protests, with half a million marching in Madrid alone. Herri Batasuna offices were attacked, and even some relatives of ETA members condemned the killing.

Later the same year, 23 members of Herri Batasuna were arrested on suspicion of ETA involvement. This prompted a name change to *Euskal Herritarrok* (Basque Citizens), and the new coalition won 14 seats in the 1998

**"MANY OF ETA'S MORE BRUTAL ATTACKS ALIENATED EVEN SOME OF ITS CORE SUPPORTERS"**



Four ETA members give a press conference nine days after the death of Admiral Carrero Blanco



The aftermath of an ETA bomb which attempted to kill Prime Minister José María Aznar



Basque policemen patrol a street of the San Sebastian after the funeral of Miguel Ángel Blanco



ETA terrorist attack in the House Civil Police barracks in Burgos

#### 17 March 2003

Batasuna is banned by the Spanish Supreme Court, the first party to be declared illegal since 1975. Basque language newspaper *Egunkaria* is shut down after 13 years.

#### 11 March 2004

The Madrid train bombings by Islamists kill 192 people, and are initially blamed on ETA. Socialist José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero is elected the following month.



#### March 2006

ETA announces a permanent ceasefire, but a bombing at Madrid International Airport in December kills two people. More crackdowns take place.

#### June 2007

ETA officially lifts the ceasefire it called the previous year. Increased policing is reported to have weakened the organisation.

#### 16 November 2008

The suspected military commander of ETA, Garikoitz Aspiazu Rubina, wanted on 22 charges including murder, is arrested in France after a joint French-Spanish police operation.

#### May-July 2009

Indications of dwindling support for outright independence. Radical separatists are banned from elections. Bombings take place in Burgos and Majorca.





Basque Regional Election, its best result since the Eighties. With a peace process underway in Northern Ireland following the Good Friday Agreement, it was speculated that a similar settlement could be reached with ETA.

### Permanent Ceasefire

Aznar's conservative administration had initially taken a hard line on Basque separatism, rejecting a 1996 ceasefire by ETA. Another ceasefire took place in September 1998, but once again talks with the government stalled, and ETA announced the resumption of hostilities 14 months later.

After the 9/11 attacks in the United States, Aznar aligned Spain with the global 'War on Terror', and ETA came under greater domestic and international pressure to renounce violence. In 2002, the Ley de Partidos (Law of parties) allowed the government to ban organisations that endorsed, directly or indirectly, acts of terrorism. This led to the banning of the Batasuna party the following year.

On the morning of 11 March 2004, bombs ripped through four trains in central Madrid, killing 192 people and injuring over 2,000 more in the worst terrorist attack in Spanish history. The culprits were later identified as belonging to an Islamist terror cell inspired by Al-Qaida, but ETA were briefly blamed, the accusation reiterated by the president of the Basque Parliament. Days later, elections brought the Socialist Workers' Party back into power, leading to fresh negotiations. In March 2006, ETA called yet another ceasefire. But this ended on 30 December when a bomb concealed in a van near the Madrid-Barajas Airport killed two

people and injured 52 more. The mastermind of this attack was the head of the ETA 'Commando Unit,' Miguel Garikoitz Aspiazu, who went by the alias Txeroki (Cherokee). His arrest two years later underscored the decline of the organisation's capabilities, and dozens of members were arrested in 2009-10.

A breakthrough came when the Donostia-San Sebastián Peace Conference was held in the Basque on 17 October 2011. Six international guests joined representatives of Basque nationalist parties: ex-UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams, Irish Taoiseach Bertie Ahern, ex Norwegian prime minister Gro Harlem, ex French interior minister Pierre Joxe, and the veteran British diplomat Jonathan Powell.

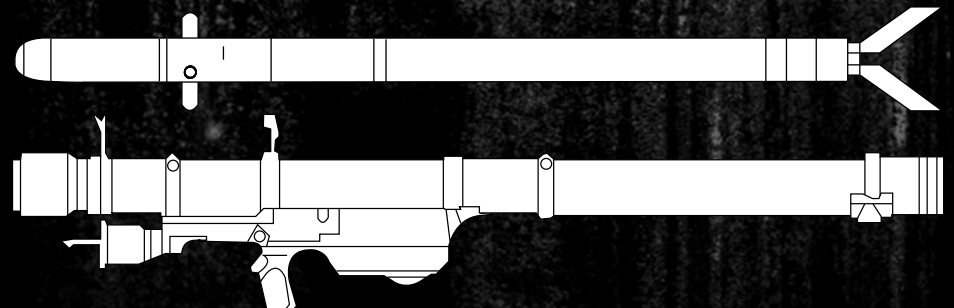
The conference resulted in a five-point statement that called on ETA to end armed action and negotiate with the Spanish and French governments. In March 2016, the veteran politician Arnaldo Otegi, a former member of the Basque parliament for Herri Batasuna, was released from prison after serving six years for his illegal attempts to restart the party.

The recent handing in of weaponry by ETA removed a serious stumbling block to negotiations. Even if outright independence currently has minority support among Basques, recent polls reveal that most of them now favour a referendum to settle the issue once and for all. The conflict has persisted for decades. But if Spain can successfully emerge from a murderous civil war and decades of dictatorship, it is hoped that the Basque identity will no longer be associated with bloodshed.

# SA-7

## 9K-32 STRELA MISSILE LAUNCHER

ORIGIN: SOVIET UNION RANGE: 3,700 METRES SPEED OF WARHEAD: 430 M/S



**ETA MADE THREE FAILED ATTEMPTS IN 2001 TO DOWN PRIME MINISTER AZNAR'S DASSAULT FALCON-900 AIRCRAFT. DOCUMENTS SOURCED FROM AN ARRESTED ETA MEMBER IN JANUARY 2010 REVEALED THAT SURFACE-TO-AIR MISSILE LAUNCHERS WERE BOUGHT FROM IRA OPERATIVES IN GERMANY IN 1999, POSSIBLY ORIGINATING FROM LIBYA.**

Images: Getty, Alamy

### 17 October 2011

The Donostia-San Sebastián International Peace Conference takes place in the Basque Country. Results in a five point statement and a 'unilateral' ETA ceasefire three days later.

### 7 April 2017

ETA reveals the location of its weapons caches and declares that it has completely disarmed. French police uncover several tonnes of weaponry.



## REVIEWS

Our pick of the latest military history books and films

## ALONE IN BERLIN

Starring: Emma Thompson, Brendan Gleeson, Daniel Brühl Director: Vincent Pérez Released: Out Now



BASED ON THE NOVEL BY HANS FALLADA. INSPIRED BY A TRUE STORY

In her autobiographical account of life in Berlin during the Second World War, *The Past Is Myself*, the British writer Christabel Bielenberg (née Burton) begins her narrative with a terrifying description of the early years after Hitler's election as Reich Chancellor. Bielenberg had married a German engineer, Peter, who was involved in the July 1944 plot to assassinate the Führer and narrowly escaped execution. The couple, like their anti-Nazi friends, would ridicule Hitler in dinner party chit-chat shortly in the weeks following the 1933 election, confident that the strutting clown would be gone in a matter of months. Gradually, she recounts, the conversation became more muted, as the Gestapo reign of terror on dissenters began to take hold.

Hans Fallada's post-war novel, *Alone In Berlin*, the true story on which the film is based, depicts a similar city crushed into silence under the Nazi jackboot, much in the way Bielenberg and her friends kept their heads below the parapet. The difference is that Fallada's heroes, Otto (Brendan Gleeson) and Anna (Emma Thompson) Quangel chose not to cower in fear.

When their only son, Hans, is killed in action in the battle of France, 1940, Otto and Anna decide to put their necks on the line, quite literally as it turned out. Otto begins to distribute hand-written postcard messages, with slogans such as "Hitler's war is the worker's death!" and "Mother! The Führer has murdered my son!" In all, more than 250 cards are dropped at random points around Berlin. The Otto and Anna Quangel of Fallada's novel are stand-ins for real-life Berliners, Otto and Elise Hampel, a working-class couple who conducted the postcard campaign for more than two years after Elise's brother was killed in the war. Arrested in October 1942, they were sentenced to death by the Volksgerichtshof (People's Court) in January 1943 and executed by beheading.

In the film, written and directed by the Swiss actor and photographer Vincent Perez, Daniel Brühl gives a powerful performance as Escherich, the dapper, moustachioed Gestapo inspector who stands in his office on Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse contemplating a map of the city into which he has stuck 44 red-flagged pins. Each one marks a spot where an inflammatory postcard has been found and handed in by a terrified member of the public. His task is to track down the source of the subversive propaganda, which in time he manages to do. Escherich's remorse following the Quangels' execution (in real life Elise died in an Allied bombing raid before she was led to the guillotine) is difficult to accept. Much more so, his act of hurling hundreds of their cards out the window into the courtyard of Gestapo headquarters.

Gleeson and Thompson pull off a difficult trick by keeping emotions for the main on a low, almost stodgy pitch, which is precisely what makes this a tense performance. It is the predictable failure of their efforts, the fatalistic acceptance of the consequences, that underscore the suicidal futility of anything but military opposition to the Nazi regime.

**"WHEN THEIR ONLY SON, HANS, IS KILLED IN ACTION IN THE BATTLE OF FRANCE IN 1940, OTTO AND ANNA DECIDE TO PUT THEIR NECKS ON THE LINE"**





# THE WAR IS IN THE MOUNTAINS

## VIOLENCE IN THE WORLD'S HIGH PLACES

**Writer:** Judith Matloff **Publisher:** Duckworth Overlook **Price:** £20 **Released:** Out now

A FASCINATING EXAMINATION OF WHY THE WORLD'S MOUNTAINOUS REGIONS ARE HOME TO SO MUCH DISCORD

Judith Matloff poses a simple question in this slim volume: how can we stop the conflicts that have been a feature of the Earth's mountainous regions for millennia? It's a simple question, but as Matloff shows, there is no simple answer.

Partly, this is because there are so many different types of conflict; partly it is because the mountainous regions themselves prevent any definitive action from being taken. It's also in some ways because the people in these regions are so fiercely independent, they react to external pressure and influence like a body's immune system reacts to a virus.

The conflicts dealt with in Matloff's book tend not to be full-scale wars – mainly because the terrain in question makes such conflict impossible. Instead she deals with simmering feuds, intractable struggles for independence and reactions to prejudice and discrimination. Often, the people involved do not want a 'problem' to be solved, and certainly don't want a solution that is imposed by outsiders. In many cases, they wish merely to be left alone.

The remoteness of mountains, the difficulty in travelling there and the lack of modern infrastructure, all make it difficult for a country's ruling class (royal or tribal in the past, political now) to reach isolated communities. This isolation itself attracts outcasts, criminals and freedom fighters, who can find safe haven in the mountains while building strength, recovering from a defeat, or merely living on their own terms.

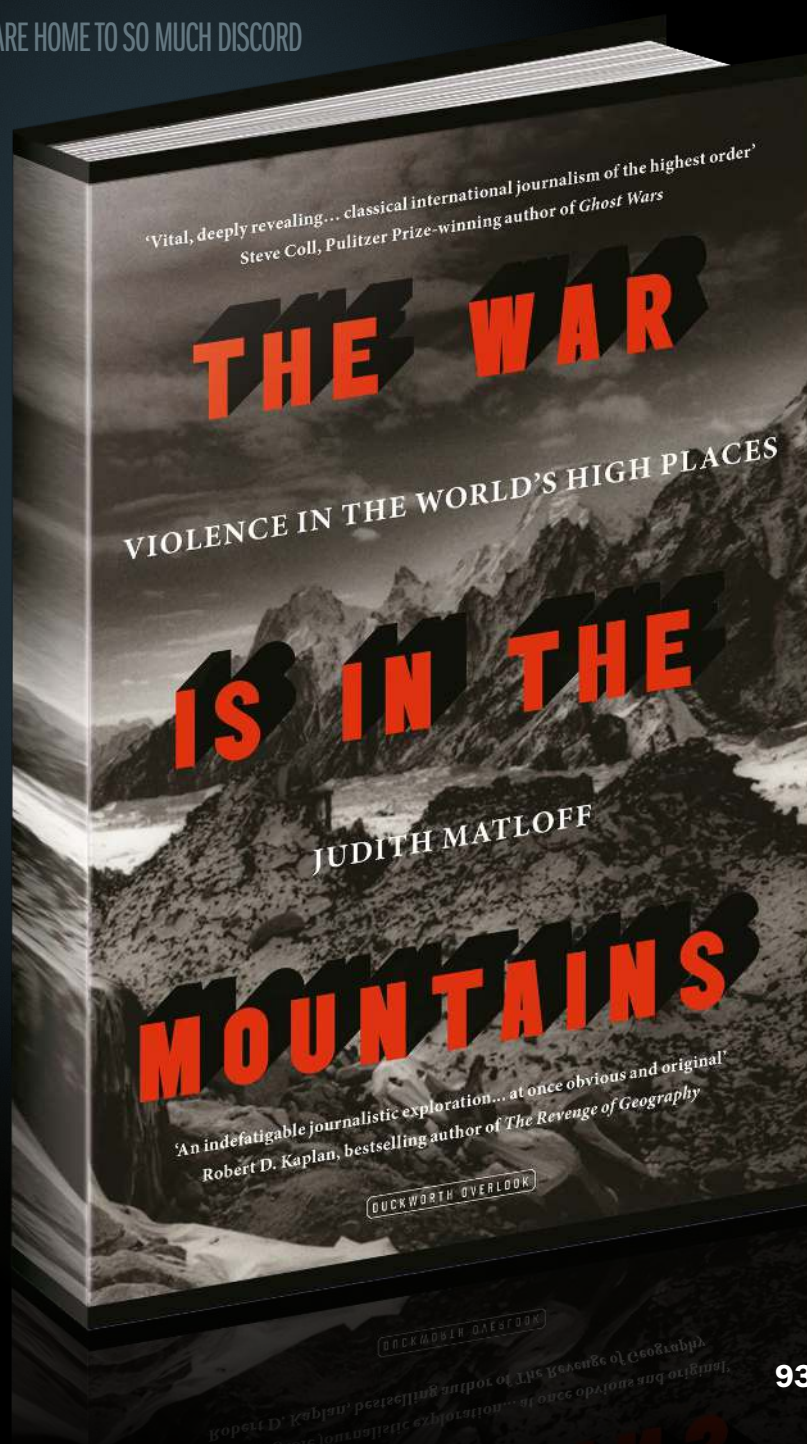
**“THIS ISOLATION ITSELF ATTRACTS OUTCASTS, CRIMINALS AND FREEDOM FIGHTERS, WHO CAN FIND SAFE HAVEN IN THE MOUNTAINS”**

Life in the mountains is hard, which tends to produce tough, resourceful but insular people. Having learned for generations to look after themselves and their own, there is little or no inclination to take part in any bigger society. In some instances this harsh life works in their favour. Poor agricultural potential means nobody is going to dispute ownership of a rough mountainside village. On the other hand, natural resources such as uranium and (of increasing importance) water, can provide friction points.

Matloff looks at a range of troubled areas, from the Dinaric Alps, where honour killings can lock families into a self-perpetuating cycle of violence lasting generations, to the Sierra Madre, where indigenous people have grown weary of endless broken promises from politicians and simply want to be able to live in peace among their own. The Andes, the Himalayas, the Caucasus – all are examined and each has its unique qualities, many which are depressingly familiar.

For Matloff, this is not merely an academic exercise, fascinating though her study is. “Far from being irrelevant,” she writes, “these remote, often archaic, and seemingly exotic exceptional communities are enormously important to the future safety and stability of the world at large.”

It is not necessarily a hopeless task. Matloff points to the peaceful tranquillity of Switzerland to show that a mountainous region does not have to be a spawning ground for superstition, suspicion and conflict. It is, however, a very major and difficult task, because, as Matloff acknowledges and some people have trouble grasping, “mountains promote violence”.





# VETERANS

## FACES OF WORLD WAR II

**Author:** Sasha Maslov **Publisher:** Princeton Architectural Press **Price:** £19.99 (Hardcover) **Released:** Out now  
 THIS NEW ORAL HISTORY CAPTIVATES THE READER WITH NEW AND VARIED TESTIMONIES FROM THE MOST CONSEQUENTIAL WAR OF THE 20TH CENTURY



The importance and legacy of the Second World War has cast a long shadow, and we still live with its consequences in a myriad of different ways today. Put simply, the modern world as we know it would not exist without the most destructive war in human history, and the people that fought and experienced it were the crucial factor in its outcome and subsequent effects.

72 years after the war ended there are now relatively few veterans left, and so Ukrainian-born photographer Sasha Maslov has compiled a new pictorial book out of, in his own words, "a sense of urgency – a sense that the stories of a generation and conflict that have indelibly shaped our modern world are soon to be lost."

*Veterans: Faces Of World War II* contains a wonderful variety of people who took part in the war, and the subjects are not all combatants. Others were children during the conflict or displaced survivors of the concentration camps and bombings, but all are united in how the war directly affected them. This is undoubtedly a

fair and balanced approach to take because it is not just soldiers and politicians who define and experience conflict; indeed, it is almost always the civilians who suffer the most.

Maslov, who is a regular contributor to publications such as the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal* and *New York Observer* among others, has compiled a striking visual work that is notable for the care he has taken with his subjects. The first things to note are of course the pictures of the veterans themselves. Each has been photographed in the interior of his or her home in stark colour. As Maslov explains this was, "to help me understand the private world of each individual and help to portray the contrast between the personal aspect of the portrait and the historical scope of the interviews." Readers will be impressed with the artistic nature of the photographs, and Maslov's talent at uniquely capturing his subjects shines through.

However, the book is not just a visual treat but also an important primary source. Maslov has

taken care to capture each veteran's story in detail and allowed him or her to not just talk about their wartime experiences but their entire lives from their pre-war childhoods right up to the present day.

There is also an impressive display of international balance. Maslov has not only included testimonies from more prominent nations such as the United States, Britain and Germany, but also more unheard voices from Russia, Japan, China, Italy and Eastern European nations among others. Consequently, the stories are extremely varied and range from Indians who fought in Burma, Axis POWs, Latvians and Finns who fought against the Russians, a Greek who fought alongside the British, and a Japanese survivor of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima.

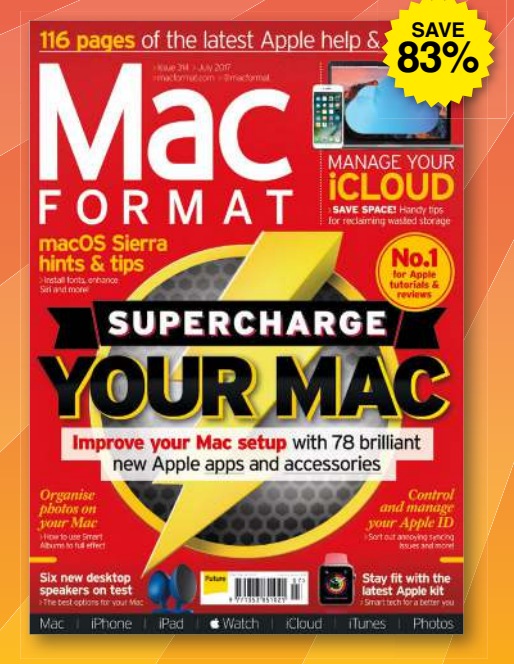
It is these testimonies that give the book its breadth and reinforces the fact that this was a truly global conflict. For an up-to-date oral history of the Second World War, Maslov's work cannot be more highly recommended.



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# FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE'S LAMP

Although it heavily defined her iconic image, Florence Nightingale's lamp was a simple Turkish paper lantern.

This unassuming but remarkable lantern from the Crimean War is intimately linked with the legendary Victorian nurse

**F**lorence Nightingale is the most famous figure to have emerged from the Crimean War (1853-56). Unique in military history, her role in improving the lives of wounded soldiers overshadowed any achievements by generals on the battlefield, and she is widely regarded as the founder of modern nursing.

Nightingale trained as a nurse in Germany, and answered a government appeal for nurses after reading newspaper accounts of British soldiers suffering in the Crimea. Having been appointed 'Superintendent of the Female Nurses in the Hospitals in the East', Nightingale arrived at the Military Hospital at Scutari in Turkey, November 1854, with a small staff. Conditions were dire, with a lack of basic equipment and provisions, and the hospital was dirty and vermin-ridden. Despite doctors' objections, Nightingale and her nurses improved medical arrangements, set up washed clothes and linen, installed food kitchens and reading rooms, and wrote letters for soldiers. This work transformed the public image of nursing, and turned it into a respectable profession.

Unfortunately, death rates at Scutari increased to 42 per cent by February 1855 because of a damaged sewer, but Nightingale's comforting role was a huge morale boost for her patients and the war effort. The *Times* newspaper reported that she would walk around the hospital beds at night to check the wounded men, and one of the lamps she used was this paper lantern. Nightingale's fame was assured when the popular poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow immortalised her in the poem 'Santa Filomena', a work that popularised the pioneering nurse's reputation as 'The Lady with the Lamp'.

*Above: Nightingale was a champion of ordinary soldiers, and continually wrote after the Crimean War, "I stand at the altar of murdered men and while I live I will fight their cause."*

**"HER ROLE IN IMPROVING THE LIVES OF WOUNDED SOLDIERS OVERSHADOWED ANY ACHIEVEMENTS BY GENERALS ON THE BATTLEFIELD"**

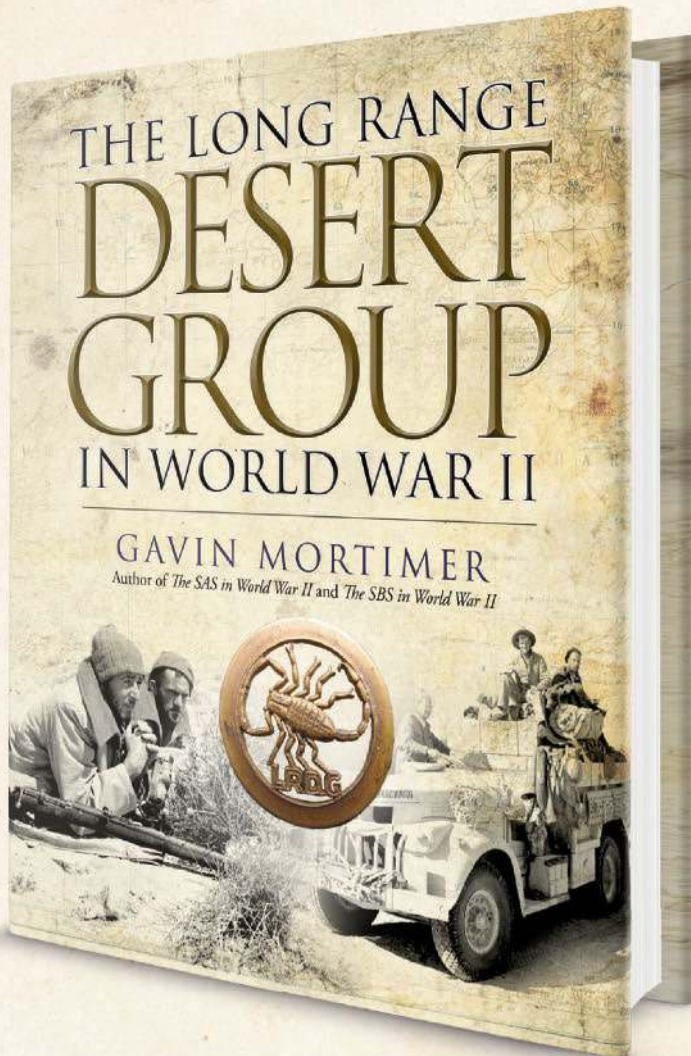
Image: National Army Museum

**NATIONAL  
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MUSEUM**

Florence Nightingale's lamp is on display in the newly reopened National Army Museum in Chelsea, London. The museum is open daily from 10.30am-5.30pm (8pm on the first Wednesday of every month).

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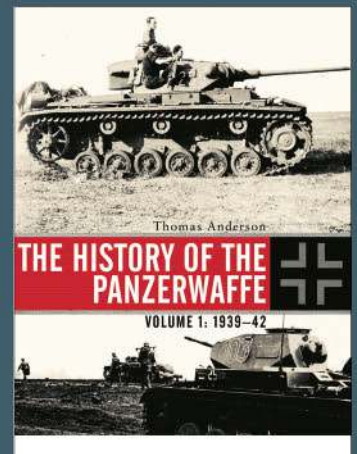
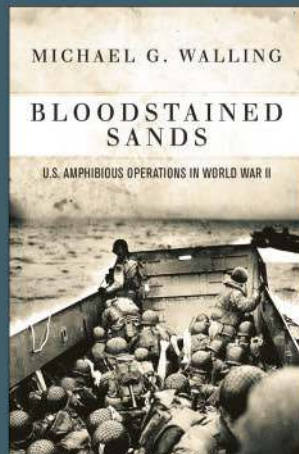
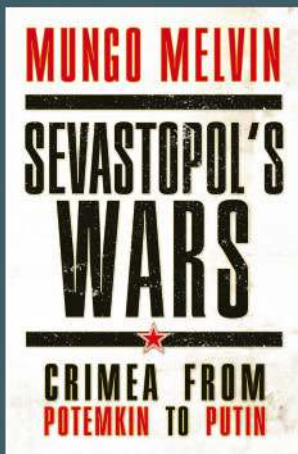


# THE LONG RANGE DESERT GROUP IN WORLD WAR II

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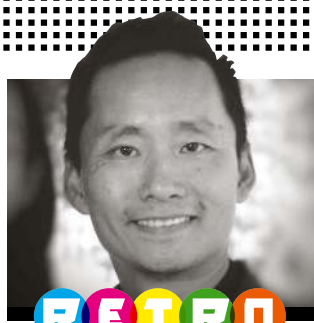
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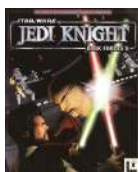
# YUAN WANG

He's had a long career and has been involved in many iconic PC games. **games™** chats to the former operations manager of Blizzard Taiwan about his life in videogame development

### SELECT GAMEOGRAPHY



**Descent**  
[1995] Programmer



**Dark Forces II: Jedi Knight**  
[1997] Programmer



**New Legends**  
[2002] Producer/  
Developer

### GROWING UP, what was your first experience of videogames?

I was born in Taiwan, but grew up in the Boston suburbs, and my dad worked at MIT. So I would go to his lab and play with his terminal computer – I think it was something like a DEC VT100. I remember playing *Adventure* and *Rogue* back in those days. At home I had an Apple IIe, and the game that captured my imagination was *Wizardry*.

### You were clearly into gaming – did you envisage at this point a career in games?

As a kid, I don't think I fully realised that humans made games! A career making them never even crossed my mind.

### Parallax Software was formed in 1993 by Matt Toschlog and Mike Kulas. How did you start work there?

I graduated with a BSEE from university and did on-campus interviews with over 30 companies. One of the companies was Looking Glass Software. They sent Mike Kulas, who was a contractor for them at the time, to conduct the interview. I remember, he was the only interviewer who wasn't wearing a business suit – he was wearing a green sweater! I stayed in touch with Mike, and when he and Matt started Parallax, they hired John Slagel and myself as their first employees. I was only 22 at the time, and only realised I wasn't working for Looking Glass when one of the to-do items on the whiteboard was "figure out a name for the company".

**Parallax's first game was a big one: the 3D space shooter *Descent* [for the full story on *Descent*, see **games™** 155]. You played a key role in its creation.**

Working on *Descent* was my first professional programming job, and Mike and Matt were my first mentors for game development. We developed on Intel 486 PCs running MSDOS. It's mind-boggling to see how far we've come.

### Was your role the same for the sequel?

I wore many hats back then: IT, building computers and networks, programming, game design, level design and even a little bit of art. For *Descent 2*, I was involved early on with design, but I left early during the development.

### Why did you leave?

My wife and I wanted to move out to California [Parallax was based in Illinois] – it was always

a dream of ours. My friend Rob Huebner, who worked on *Descent* with us, was interviewing around the industry and knew I was looking to move. When he interviewed for the *Jedi Knight* team, he recommended


me and I came on board as well. Rob and I ended up being roommates.

### How did working at Lucasarts contrast with Parallax?

Parallax was basically a super scrappy start-up during the development of *Descent*. It was an amazing experience helping to build a company in my early twenties, but it had many stressful moments. In contrast, Lucasarts was well-funded and had cool perks like great holiday parties, movie screenings at Skywalker Ranch, and basically being around *Star Wars* all the time. I am a huge *Star Wars* nerd, so it definitely was a cool time in my life. We worked long hours at both places, and played lots of games after work. I remember thinking that it was a good

**AS A KID, I DON'T THINK I FULLY REALISED THAT HUMANS MADE GAMES!**





sign during development when we would need to remember to spend more time working on the games rather than playtesting.

### PC gaming technology was moving at a ferocious pace at that point.

Windows 95 was in beta when we started development on *Jedi*, and 3D graphics hardware was barely coming into existence. And the internet was around, but nothing like it is today. But both teams were pretty close and I've stayed in touch with most of the people in some way. We've done a few *Descent* reunions – it would be cool to do a *Jedi* one.

### Your career was continuing apace at Lucasarts with involvement on *Grim Fandango* and *Indiana Jones And The Infernal Machine*. What do you recall of these iconic games?

Both of those games used technology that we built, including a level editor tool that I made with Winston Wolff, another programmer. We called it LEIA – Level Editing Is Art. Unfortunately, I never had the chance to play the *Indiana Jones* game, but *Grim Fandango* is one of my favourite games of all time – I love the artwork and the storyline, just beautiful.

### You eventually left Lucasarts and created your own studio along with Justin Chin [*Jedi Knight* project lead].

Justin and I started Infinite Machine as we wanted to create a studio with a strong culture and create a spiritual successor to *Jedi Knight*. Our original publisher was GT Interactive, who we signed a deal with in 1998 to create a PC shooter with an alternate post-apocalyptic future China theme, using the Unreal engine. During the Infogrames acquisition of GT, our project was cancelled and we had to scramble to find a new publisher. THQ picked us up as an Xbox launch title, so we started working to port the game from PC to Xbox.

### What was it like developing on that new platform?

The Xbox was great to develop for. It used Visual Studio, DirectX 8 and the hardware was solid. However, we were using the Unreal Engine during the console transition so it was still challenging to port. Epic was on a later schedule for the Unreal Warfare engine which supported DirectX 8, and we were unable to use their latest tech. We had to rebuild parts of the Unreal engine, which was architected as a software rasterised BSP engine, and not very suitable for DirectX 8. We also had to redesign the game from a first-person-shooter that had melee combat (like *Jedi Knight*) to a third-person martial arts combat game that incorporated guns.

### How did the game, *New Legends*, do?

It wasn't a commercial success, but building and running Infinite Machine was my real-world business school where I learned how to run a company, negotiate legal contracts and manage a team of 20 people.

### What happened after the end of Infinite Machine?

I had two offers on the table straight after. One was to work on *Sim City 4* at Maxis as a graphics programmer, and the other was at Midway, which was more of an overall development role. I chose Midway, and moved to San Diego at that point.

### What was your role at Midway?

I was a technical director for its third-party publishing division. The way things were structured was that there would be a producer to manage the production, an art director to manage the visuals and a technical director to manage the programming and other technical aspects of the projects in the interests of the publisher. This involved evaluating the development teams, milestone approvals and being the publisher counterpart for the technical leads at the third-party studios – and support them as necessary.

## IT WASN'T A COMMERCIAL SUCCESS, BUT BUILDING AND RUNNING INFINITE MACHINE WAS MY REAL-WORLD BUSINESS SCHOOL

### You presumably did the latter role for Midway's *The Suffering*?

When I joined, that was already under development by Surreal Software. I had met some of those guys previously at industry events, so had a previous relationship. They had a solid tech team, so, yes, I supported them more on their requirements in tech terms. Generally, as a technical director for Midway, most of the work was helping the production teams firefight on projects that weren't going well.

### What happened after Midway?

Justin and I explored rebooting Infinite Machine with some of the team, but that didn't happen. So I started work at Disney as a director of production, working for Buena Vista Games, which became Disney Interactive Studios. I worked in a production role, assisting various projects such as *Turok* and *Meet The Robinsons* with art and tech outsourcing. I spent most of my time sourcing and evaluating studios, putting together the project specs and legal contracts, and managing the production of the assets or code. I also had the opportunity to produce the *Meet The Robinsons* Nintendo DS project in Japan. It was an emergency special project that I built with a small studio in Tokyo called Altron.

It was from contact to submission to Nintendo, a three month project, so that was actually the project I'm most proud of – it felt like an impossible mission, and I had to pull off some MacGyver moves to make it happen.

### You then left Disney for an operational role at Blizzard?

I'd had conversations with Blizzard throughout the years, but nothing clicked until I was about to take a job offer in Singapore. As a formality before accepting, I asked for a reference from my old boss, who was then at Blizzard as the head of international publishing. He said, "Before you take that job, I could use your help in Taiwan." So I took a position as operations director for Blizzard Taiwan and managed a team responsible for go-to-market launches of all Blizzard's game in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau. It was eye-opening to see the amount of work required to co-ordinate and simultaneously launch huge titles such as *World Of Warcraft*, *Starcraft 2* and *Diablo 3*. I was there for four years and helped launch eight titles.

### So a lot of management roles – do you miss coding and creating games?

Sometimes. My son is into games now, and we talk about building something together.

My own interests have shifted as I've gotten older, though.

### What's your favourite game that you worked on, and the one you were most disappointed in?

*Descent* was my favourite,

because the team was so small back then and I feel that it is the game that has the most of my personal creative energy in it. *New Legends* was the most disappointing – it had potential, but we could never pull it together.

### You've had a broad career in videogames. How do you look back on it today?

I've learned everything that I could possibly ever want to know about the games industry and met some incredible people. I'm friends with many people that defined the industry, and it was a great and long set of chapters in my life. I wouldn't say I'm fond of it all, but it feels complete and closed. I still love playing games, and doing it with my kids is one of my favourite things to do in the world.

### What are you up to today?

My career afforded me the opportunity to take some time off, so I've spent the last three years on a sabbatical – travelling the world, self-exploration and personal growth. I'm now focused on projects involving blockchain technologies, machine learning and I spend most of my time studying future technologies so I can write the next chapters in my career.







## STREET FIGHTER X TEKKEN

■ Many said it would never happen – and in the case of *Tekken X Street Fighter* it likely won't – but this mad crossover is one of the finest examples we've ever received. The expansive roster and deep game mechanics are praiseworthy, though perhaps more impressive was the way in which Capcom was able to convert *Tekken*'s 3D characters (not to mention their movesets) into its 2D spaces so convincingly.



## TATSUNOKO VS. CAPCOM: ULTIMATE ALL-STARS

■ Some 26 characters from an eclectic array of Capcom IP and a bizarre line-up of Tatsunoko Production anime franchises, such as *Science Ninja Team Gatchaman*, *Yatterman* and *Neo-Human Casshern*, *Ultimate All-Stars* almost works in spite of itself. But the fact remains, this strange crossover fighter is actually a whole lot of fun.



## MORTAL KOMBAT VS. DC UNIVERSE

■ This release from Midway Games just goes to show how popular the crossover fighting game had become within a decade of its initial popularity surge. DC was never going to let the *Mortal Kombat* developer brutalise its most popular icons in the way that we would typically expect, and *MK Vs. DC* felt toned down as a result. Not being able to deliver a Fatality! to the likes of Batman and Wonder Woman was always going to disappoint.



## SOULCALIBUR II

■ While this isn't strictly a crossover fighting game in the traditional sense, it is notable for the way in which Bandai Namco tried to leverage the selling power of the crossover for commercial gain. This would lead to *The Legend Of Zelda*'s Link, Heihachi Mishima of *Tekken* fame and Image Comics' Spawn making appearances for specific formats. This would escalate in later years to include the likes of Yoda/Darth Vader and Assassin's Creed's Ezio Auditore da Firenze.



# GAMING CLOTHING



## MCCLLOUD'S ARWING ACADEMY

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[www.gamerprint.co.uk](http://www.gamerprint.co.uk)



## JINX PERIPHERALS

Jinx is celebrating 18 years in the business of making gamer apparel, which is pretty impressive. The only thing more impressive are its unique designs, like this celebration of our cable-wrapped lifestyle.

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## ROCKET LEAGUE GAME ON JERSEY

Another piece of work from the Jinx team, this time an officially licensed jersey for all the *Rocket League* fanatics out there. It's one of the best videogame sports around, so you may as well show your colours on game day.

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# DARK SOULS BOARD GAME

SOLD BY: GAME PRICE: \$119.99



■ The game even features boss battles – the Dancer Of The Boreal Valley is there on the board.

**AFTER A HUGE**LY successful Kickstarter campaign, this board game adaptation of the *Dark Souls* experience is finally available and it's managed to remain far more faithful to its source material than you might expect. This is one tough board game, packed full of lore from the *Dark Souls* universe and with as much of a challenge to offer players as its digital forebear. Tabletop aficionados may want something more robust, but fans of the game will find plenty to appreciate.

[www.thinkgeek.com](http://www.thinkgeek.com)



## DESTINY HUNTER FIGURE

■ This collaboration between premium toy maker ThreeA and Bungie has resulted in a pretty amazing-looking replica of a classic Hunter from *Destiny*. ThreeA has made three variations on the Hunter, although it's the Autumn Shader version that you'll find on ThinkGeek at the moment. This one comes with the Imago Loop Hand Cannon, LDR-5001 Sniper Rifle and Tomorrow's Answer Rocket Launcher. All of the figures are 1/6 scale and come with a fabric cloak for additional authenticity.

[www.thinkgeek.com](http://www.thinkgeek.com)



## SHEIKAH SLATE SKETCHBOOK

■ Not only would this replica of the Sheikah Slate make a pretty awesome accessory for any Link cosplayers, but it's also wonderfully practical as a sketchbook. The pad itself has 100 pages, all of which are perforated so they're perfect for drawing little sketches and then passing on to friends or anyone you happen to meet on your adventures. Yeah, it's a pretty geeky thing to be carrying, but it's a far more practical Link accessory to walk around with than the Master Sword.

[www.thinkgeek.com](http://www.thinkgeek.com)



## POKÉ BALL LUNCH CASE

■ We like to go out and catch our lunches since we just don't think there's much sport in having it prepared ahead of time, but if we happened to have something left over we would definitely consider using this Poké Ball lunchbox as a means of transporting it back into the **games™** office. It features a classic push-button release, plenty of room for snacks and is dishwasher safe. How many Poké Ball manufacturers can make those claims?

[www.thinkgeek.com](http://www.thinkgeek.com)



# NINTENDO 64 ANTHOLOGY

PUBLISHER: GEEKS LINE

**THERE'S NOT MUCH** about Mathieu Manent's exploration of the history, hardware, accessories and games of the Nintendo 64 that we can quibble with. It's an impressively comprehensive, well-researched and well-designed book, packed full of images and insight. We found only a couple of smaller issues that hold it back from being an all-time classic.

In terms of the games breakdown, it has all of the information you could wish for, with boxart of the PAL, Japanese and US editions (where appropriate), a game rating as well as a rarity rating and a breakdown of the gameplay and history of the titles covered. What's more, the screenshot quality, on the whole, is very good. We can tell you from experience that getting good-quality images of early 3D titles isn't always as easy as you might hope.

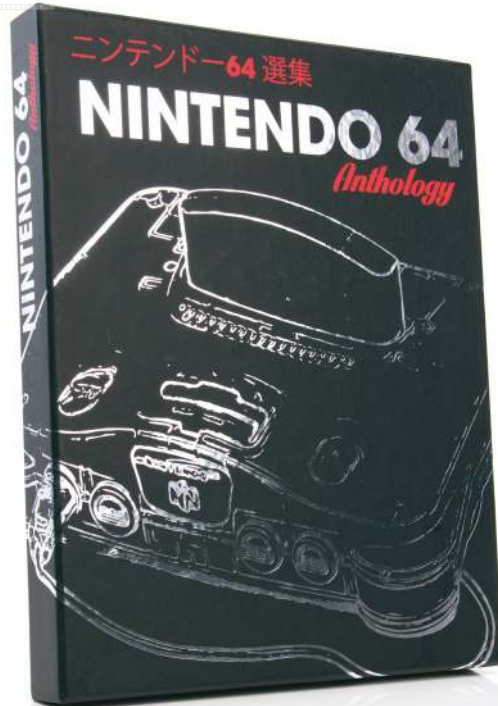
Beyond that central meat of the book, Manent has looked deeper into the history of the console as well as exploring how it has lived on through

ports to the Nintendo DS and the franchises that appeared on other platforms in the years that followed the N64's demise. Interviews and quotes about the console from developers rounds off a pretty robust section giving some great context to the machine.

The only issues we really have are a couple of rather low-quality images here and there, which is a shame and

we're also not sure about the overall structure, as the book is frontloaded with history while the games are quite deep into the package. But these are relatively small concerns in what is a generally enjoyable celebration of Nintendo's third home console.

[www.funstockretro.co.uk](http://www.funstockretro.co.uk)



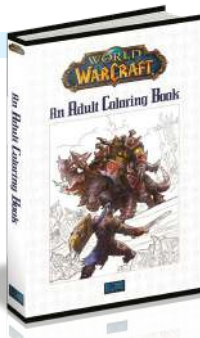
VERDICT **9/10**



## THE WITCHER VOLUME 3: CURSE OF CROWS

Collecting issues one through to five of the Curse Of Crows arc from *The Witcher* comic series, Geralt and Ciri team up in a tale of revenge. Since CD Projekt Red seems unlikely to return to this series, this might be your best bet for enjoying more stories in this world.

[www.darkhorse.com](http://www.darkhorse.com)



## WORLD OF WARCRAFT: ADULT COLORING BOOK

We thought we were done with these, but they keep on being made. Now it's WOW's turn to get a colouring book adaptation, bringing you the best of Blizzard's concepts, paintings and sketches converted to outline form. Will it be relaxing? Might depend on whether the Horde terrifies you or not.

[www.forbiddenplanet.com](http://www.forbiddenplanet.com)



## MINECRAFT GUIDE TO CREATIVE

Part of a new official collection of *Minecraft* guides, this volume is all about getting the most out of your building skills. With excellent isometric images, blueprints and colour co-ordination tips, this is a great little addition to your *Minecraft* library. (We assume it's looking pretty packed.)

[www.egmont.co.uk](http://www.egmont.co.uk)

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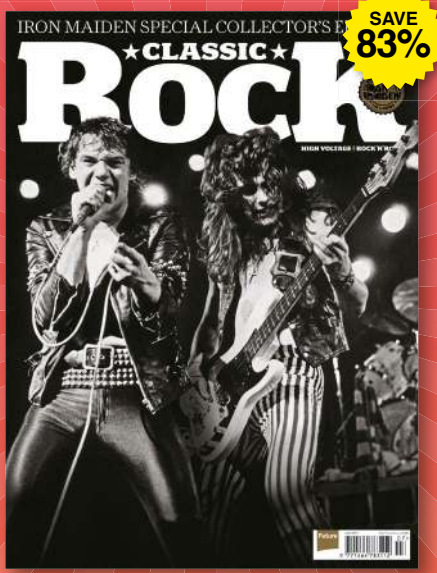
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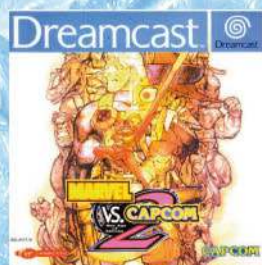
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